Rolling Stone
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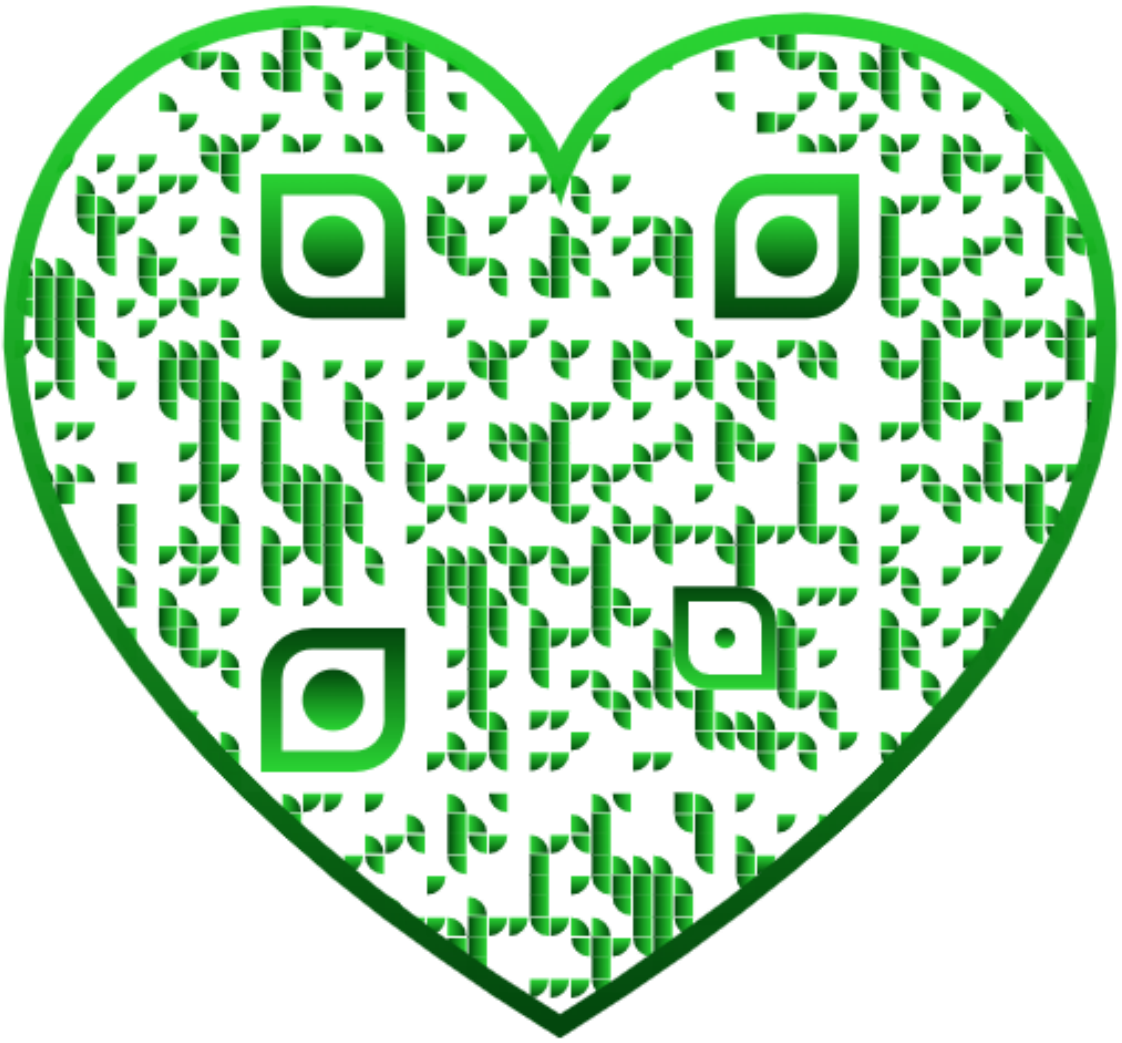
Doja Cat

THE *DGAF* SUPERSTAR FINALLY DROPS HER GUARD



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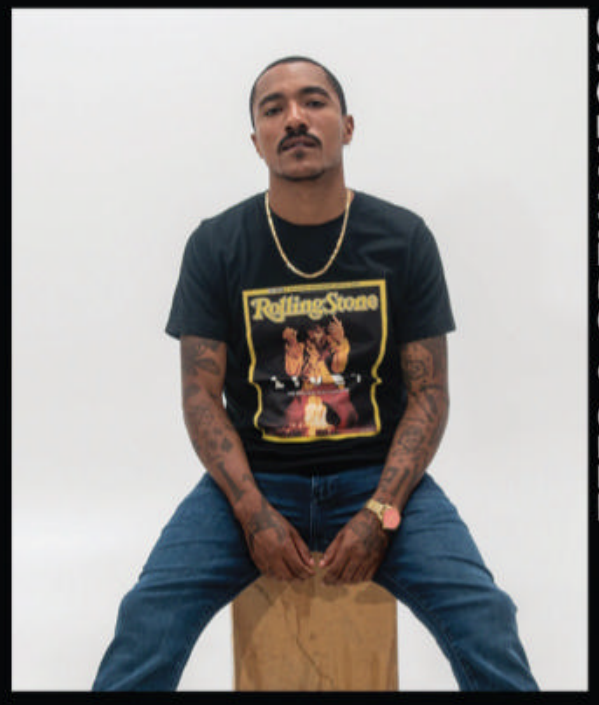

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On the Cover

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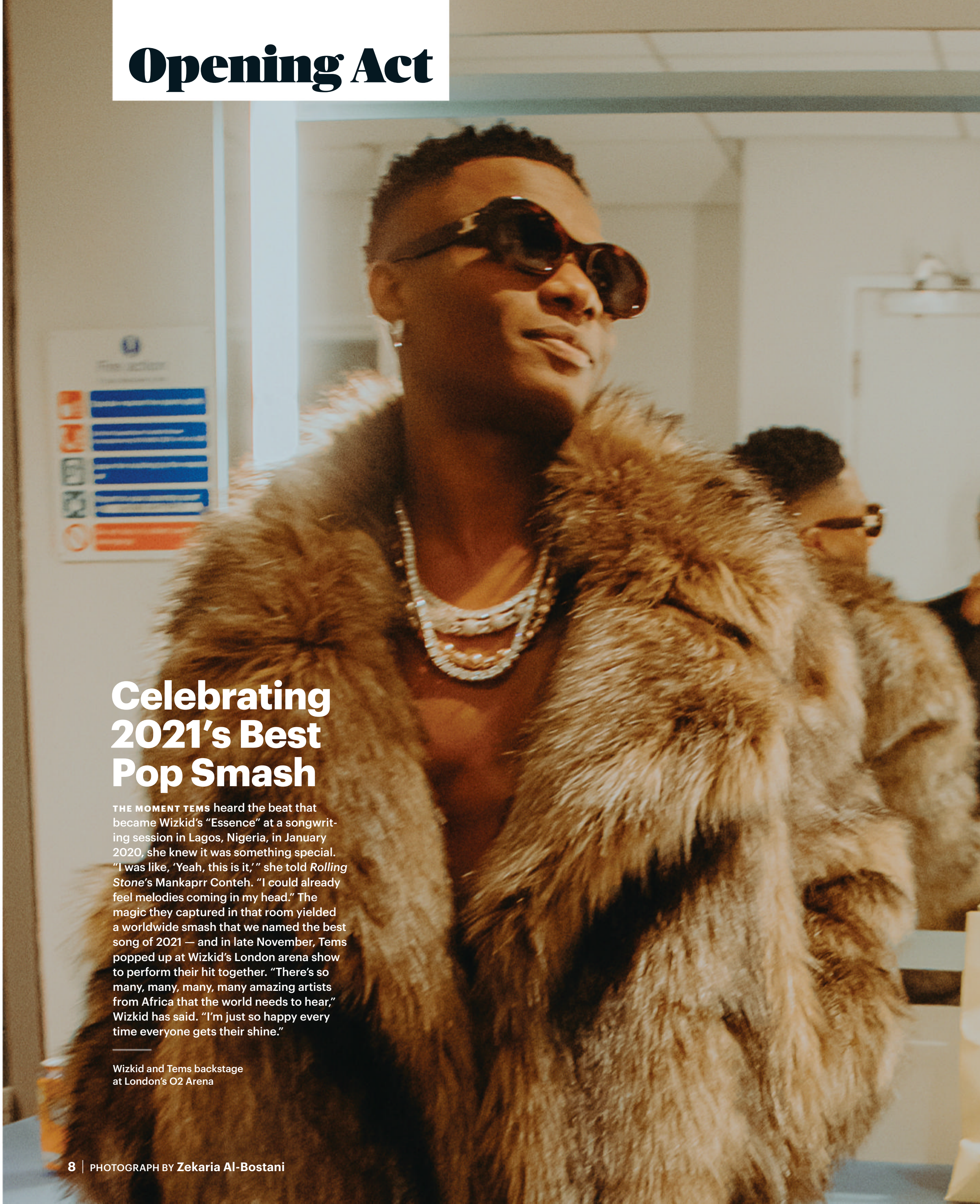

Celebrating 2021's Best Pop Smash

THE MOMENT TEMS heard the beat that became Wizkid's "Essence" at a songwriting session in Lagos, Nigeria, in January 2020, she knew it was something special. "I was like, 'Yeah, this is it,' " she told *Rolling Stone*'s Mankaprr Conteh. "I could already feel melodies coming in my head." The magic they captured in that room yielded a worldwide smash that we named the best song of 2021 — and in late November, Tems popped up at Wizkid's London arena show to perform their hit together. "There's so many, many, many, many amazing artists from Africa that the world needs to hear," Wizkid has said. "I'm just so happy every time everyone gets their shine."

Wizkid and Tems backstage at London's O2 Arena

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The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

Big Thief Get Even Realer

With a new double album recorded in a pandemic, indie rock's most dogged seekers are still looking for some truth

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Sacha Lecca** | **11**

PHOTOS

BTS' ARMY Assembles Once Again

BTS PLAYED their first in-person concert since the start of the pandemic at L.A.'s SoFi Stadium on Nov. 27, and members of their fan base, known as ARMY, flocked from all across the globe to spend a euphoric evening singing along to hits like "Dynamite," "Butter," "Silver Spoon," and "Permission to Dance." It was an emotional moment, after the band was forced to cancel a world tour in 2020. "Yesterday, I really shouldn't say this, but it's the first time that I saw you in two years, and, honestly, it was a little awkward," Jimin told the crowd. "To be honest, I don't think I did all I could do for you guys for the past two years, so it's an honor, and I'm really moved that all of you waited for us." The fans not only waited, but they also showed up with signs, masks, and costumes that displayed their undying devotion to the group. These photos capture the celebratory scene outside the stadium. ANDY GREENE

▲ FANS WITH LUV
A fan shows off a stack of BTS photographs before the show. "It means a lot to everybody," they said. "We are a family. We actually love each other."

▶ WE MISSED YOU
Fans showed up at the stadium hours before doors opened, and many carried signs in both English and Korean. This one sums up the feelings of many.

BIG THIEF

WHEN BIG THIEF'S Adrianne Lenker hears her band's music in the background at a cafe, she winces. "I just feel like, 'Man, I remember recording that song and how radical it felt, how raw it felt, like we were ripping something open,' " she says. "And now, here in this coffee shop, it's just completely blinded into the blur of everything. There's no drama in it."

In the past few years, Big Thief have started to get played in quite a few coffee shops. With their pair of 2019 albums, *U.F.O.F.* and *Two Hands*, the folk-rock quartet became the type of indie favorite that sells out theaters and gets nominated for Grammys. "It's really lovely to witness a purely motivated art collective kicking ass," says Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, a longtime fan of the band. "One of the reasons they're so fascinating is that everything [they release] is at a really, really high bar."

No album's recording process has felt more radically raw than the one for *Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You*, the 20-song double LP Big Thief will release in February. During the dark days of the summer 2020 lockdown, Lenker, guitarist Buck Meek, drummer James Krivchenia, and bassist Max Oleartchik spent five months recording in locations from the Arizona desert and the Colorado mountains to upstate New York and Los Angeles. The resulting album feels like a greatest-hits compilation of what Big Thief do best, refining many textures – the surging rock of "Little Things," the drum-machine pop of "Wake Me Up to Drive," the ramshackle folk of "Certainty" – into one sprawling statement. "There are so many different sides to Adrianne's songwriting," says Krivchenia, who produced the album. "I was like, 'It would be nice to make space for everything.' "

Big Thief have maintained a staggering level of output since their 2016 debut. During

FAST FACTS

DRIP TOO HARD
The band recorded shattering icicles for one new song. "It's captured energy of that ice in that winter," Lenker says.

A LIGHTER SIDE
There's levity on songs like "Spud Infinity," where Lenker rhymes "finish" with "potato knish."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Maggie Shannon**

◀ LIGHT UP

Fans hold up ARMY Bomb Lights — the officially licensed light sticks of BTS' fan base. Many attendees brought them to the show, creating a magical atmosphere inside the stadium when the lights dimmed and the superstars took the stage.

▲ LIFE GOES ON

The atmosphere outside the stadium before the show often felt like an impromptu convention of BTS' biggest fans from around the world.

▼ MASK UP

RM told the crowd that ARMY helped him get through the pandemic. "You guys are the magic," he said.

▲ IDOLS

During the show, Jin told the audience that his connection to BTS fans is "almost like a movie." "And to make this movie of life with you really makes me happy," he said. "This is a movie that we'll continue to make until the very last day of our lives."

▲ LONG TIME COMING

BTS fans Briana and Natalie felt a little uneasy about being at a mass public event. "It's a little scary, but I'm excited to party tonight and enjoy the music," one said. "We did the online concerts, so this has been a long time coming."

the pandemic, when many artists have found themselves running up against logistical and creative roadblocks, three of Big Thief's four members released solo LPs; they recorded roughly 45 songs for *Dragon,* and Krivchenia suggests the sessions yielded at least one other album's worth of material. "Each of us have, like, four songs that we were personally like, 'I cannot believe that song got cut.'"

Lenker has spent a lot of time thinking about the ways in which that level of artistic output has contributed to Big Thief's success. She's wary of Big Thief's role providing content for a modern music industry that she sees as "deeply flawed, and in a lot of cases, harmful." "We're part of the machine, and I haven't figured it out yet," she says. "It's a male-dominated, white-supremacist industry, and I'd like to carve out spaces where people aren't being pigeonholed because of their gender, their color, their sexual orientation. I still don't even know the half of it."

"We're part of the machine, and I haven't figured it out yet," Lenker says. "I'd like to carve out spaces where people aren't being pigeonholed."

Some of her misgivings about modern life come through on the new song "Simulation Swarm," which Lenker says was inspired by a series of intense experiences: Her four-day hospitalization in Brooklyn in May 2020, when, she says, her body broke down after seven years of touring; the breakup that inspired her arresting 2020 solo album, *songs*; her early childhood, which was spent in a Midwestern separatist community she's described as a "religious cult." It's an understatedly stunning song that helps explain the profound connection Lenker and Big Thief have fostered with their fan base.

Dragon closes with "Blue Lightning," a campfire singalong that Lenker wrote as a love letter to her bandmates, whom she considers her chosen family. "We've been a band for nearly a decade, and the more life experiences we have together, the more I write about them," she says. "It's crazy and sad and bittersweet and so beautiful – but the friendships feel so important." JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

RS RECOMMENDS

OUR TOP POP-CULTURE PICKS OF THE MONTH

MOVIE

1. ‘Scream’

For the fifth installment of the genre-bending franchise, Ghostface terrorizes a new generation of hot Woodsboro teens. Luckily, Neve Campbell, David Arquette, and Courteney Cox are also back to meta-explain horror-movie survival.

DOCUMENTARY

2. ‘Carole King & James Taylor: Just Call Out My Name’

The pair reflect on their decades-spanning friendship, while weaving in footage from their 1970 Troubadour show and their 2010 reunion tour.

TOUR

3. The War on Drugs

The transporting indie rockers added Eighties-arena heft on their new album, *I Don’t Live Here Anymore* — and if their recent livestream is any indication, their return to the road should be a lighter-waving good time.

BOOK

4. ‘Rise: A Pop History of Asian America From the Nineties to Now’

With essays, cartoons, and contributions from NBA trailblazer Jeremy Lin and *Crazy Rich Asians* director Jon M. Chu, among others, this scholarly-yet-fun history of the Asian American experience touches on everything from politics to pop music.

PODCAST

5. ‘Gone South’

The first season of Cadence13’s new podcast focuses on the unsolved murder of Margaret Coon, a sex-crimes prosecutor who was found dead in an upscale subdivision in Louisiana. Journalist Jed Lipinski talked to investigators, DEA agents, and those close to Coon to try and find some answers.

TV SHOW

6. ‘The Afterparty’

At the class of 2006’s 15-year reunion, a ska-head turned pop star ends up dead, and everyone’s a suspect. This Apple TV series is part country-house mystery, part rom-com — tied together by Tiffany Haddish as a detective with secrets of her own.

ALBUM

7. ‘Only an Octave Apart‘

Whether melding Dido’s “White Flag” with a 17th-century aria or covering “Under Pressure,” queer cabaret icon Justin Vivian Bond and countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo blow up gender and genre over 12 tracks, creating harmonies you never even knew you were missing.

For reviews, premieres, and more, go to RollingStone.com/music

DOCUSERIES

8. ‘The Murders at Starved Rock’

Starved Rock State Park is both an idyllic woodland getaway and the site of a 1960 triple murder. This three-part HBO series follows the 15-year investigation by David Raccuglia — son of the prosecutor who put suspect Chester Weger away for life — as he questions the official story.

TIKTOK ACCOUNT

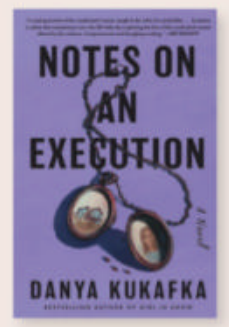
9. Francis Bourgeois

The biggest star on TikTok isn’t a 17-year-old dancer or even Jason Derulo: It’s Francis Bourgeois, a young man with nearly 2 million followers whose infectious enthusiasm for trains has captured the world’s imagination.

NEW BOOK PUTS THE READER ON DEATH ROW

Novelist Danya Kukafka

DANYA KUKAFKA’S newest novel, *Notes on an Execution,* was inspired, in part, by how tired she is of Ted Bundy: “Why, 30 years after his death, are we still releasing his unheard tapes, are we still making movies with Zac Efron?” The psychological novel — her second after her acclaimed debut, *Girl in Snow* — puts the reader in the shoes of serial killer Ansel, who is on death row after killing a string of young girls. As he gets closer to the death chamber, though, we spend more time with those around him, including his mother and the detective who hunts him down. Kukafka’s focus on these characters came after watching years of crime shows and growing weary of the focus on the killers. “I felt that there was a larger story to tell, not only about the killers, but about the tangle that pointless male violence always leaves behind,” she says. “This is a book for the women who survive.” As for Ansel, a white male killer with delusions of grandeur and a not-bad face — sound familiar? — by relegating him to a lesser role, Kukafka sought to strip some mystique from the serial-killer mythology: “I wanted to prove that the serial killers actually are not that interesting; they’re just average men who decide to do bad things.” **BRENNA EHRLICH**



FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: SHAWN BRACKBILL; UNIVERSAL PICTURES; RANDY HOLMES/ABC/GETTY IMAGES; JACK KAY/DAILY EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES; DEVIN MUÑOZ; RUVEN AFANADOR

MOVIE

The Original Valley Girl

How P.T. Anderson turned Alana Haim into a big-screen star with 'Licorice Pizza'

By ANDY GREENE

ONCE UPON A TIME IN ENCINO Above: Haim and Hoffman as kids in something like love in *Licorice Pizza*. Left: Anderson (right) with cameraman Colin Anderson on set.

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON was helping Haim prepare for their headlining set at Coachella in 2018 when the Academy Award-winning director of *Boogie Nights, There Will Be Blood,* and *Phantom Thread* turned to guitarist-singer Alana Haim with a thought. "He said, 'I'm going to put you in a movie,'" says Alana, the youngest of the three Haim sisters. "I was like, 'OK. All right. I'll be fine walking in the background of a movie.'"

Anderson had something much more than a quick cameo in store. The movie that became *Licorice Pizza* (out now) was still germinating in his brain at that point, but he knew it would be about a precocious 15-year-old boy in early-Seventies Los Angeles who falls for a brash, sharp-tongued woman 10 years his senior. And even though Anderson is one of the most acclaimed directors in Hollywood, who could pick just about any actress in the world for the lead, he wanted Alana, a complete novice to acting.

"Alana has a ferocious and intimidating side to her," says Anderson. "She will come out swinging against anyone that threatens anything that she loves and holds dear. That is a very admirable quality, and I felt that if she could push that onto the screen, it would be dramatic, comedic, heartwarming, and definitely worth watching."

The 51-year-old director came to this conclusion after spending countless hours with Alana, 30, and her older sisters, Este and Danielle, over the past decade, though his relationship with the Haim family actually goes back to his childhood in the early Eighties, when their mother, Donna Rose, taught his elementary-school art class. He didn't make that connection when he heard Haim's 2012 debut single, "Forever," on the radio and became an instant fan. "I loved the way they sounded, and I loved the way that they made music, and I loved the way that they looked," he says. "It felt like love at first sight."

Anderson wanted to meet the band, but they were all in their early twenties and he was afraid an out-of-the-blue request from a much older man might come off as "creepy," he says. Instead, he offered to direct their music videos: "I was trying to put myself up for a job."

He had no idea Este had given the *Boogie Nights* soundtrack to both Danielle and Alana when they turned 16 as a "bible for the rest of your life," or that Alana was obsessed with the movie. When they heard through a mutual friend, Electric Guest frontman Asa Taccone, that Anderson was trying to track them down, they were dumbfounded. "Obviously, my mom had met Paul," says Alana. "It felt cosmic. We were always supposed to meet, but we were kind of orbiting and our worlds hadn't collided yet. But we'd always wanted it to happen."

They arranged to meet at Anderson's house, which he shares with his longtime partner, Maya Rudolph, and their four children. "I don't think I've ever been more nervous in my life," says Alana. "When we got there, we didn't want to tell Paul that my mom had taught him. Finally, Este was like, 'My mom taught you! Her name is Miss Rose!' That was when our relationship really started."

Anderson was busy the next few years creating movies such as *Inherent Vice* and *Phantom Thread,* but he still took the time to essentially become Haim's unofficial creative director. He directed six of their music videos, the 2017 documentary *Valentine,* about the making of their LP *Something to Tell You,* took the cover photo of their 2020 *Women in Music Pt. III* album, and even helped out with their stage designs. "Having a friendship with three musicians and a collaboration that doesn't have distinct walls is very nice," says Anderson. "It's so exciting to watch them play. They're so accomplished."

By this point, they've grown so close that Alana and Anderson finish each other's sentences as they sit side by side in a swanky New York hotel, and he gently teases her over her throwback Seventies clothing and scatterbrained memory. He's also made keen observations about the pecking order within Haim. "I initially thought I'd be most afraid of Este," he says. "She's the tallest, the leader, and she's sort of in charge. But when you figure out the dynamic and really get to know them,

FROM TOP: PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON/© 2021 METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURES INC.; MELINDA SUE GORDON/© 2021 METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURES INC.

you realize that the one to be afraid of is Alana."

It was during the making of the 2017 Haim video "Little of Your Love" that Anderson introduced the sisters to Cooper Hoffman, the teenage son of the late actor Philip Seymour Hoffman. Anderson asked them to watch Hoffman for a few hours as he dealt with a problem that popped up in the *Phantom Thread* editing suite, and they took him to a nearby restaurant to kill time. "Almost immediately, he was working the room, asking me and my sisters questions," says Alana. "I think he was 13 or 14, and it was almost like someone that I went to high school with. There was no, 'I'm babysitting a kid.' It was, 'I'm having dinner with a dude.' It was crazy. I was like, 'I wish I was like this kid when I was his age.' "

Haim at the Grammys, March 2021

The rapport between Alana and Cooper stayed in Anderson's mind as he worked on the screenplay for *Licorice Pizza*, which was largely inspired by wild stories that the film producer Gary Goetzman told him about his teenage years in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, where he made money by selling water beds and taking odd acting jobs. He fictionalized it by having the kid, whom he named Gary Valentine, fall madly in love with a 25-year-old woman named Alana he meets when she's assisting a photographer at his school.

Alana was stunned when the script arrived and she was one of the two main characters, and was stunned again when she learned Cooper Hoffman, who also had never been in a movie, would be her co-star. There's a significant age gap between them that makes it highly implausible that their characters would couple up, but that only fueled Anderson's creativity when figuring out their arc. "He's amazingly emotionally mature, and she is not," says Anderson. "That makes a very good story since he's not of age, so this is an insurmountable obstacle, period. There's a line in the sand. Now what happens? The friendship they have deepens, it grows."

The cast is fleshed out by heavyweight actors like Sean Penn and Bradley Cooper, but Anderson also cast Este, Danielle, and their parents, Mordechai and Donna, to play Alana's family in bit roles. It led to a surreal day for Alana, when her entire family was on set for a Shabbat dinner scene in which her character's boyfriend, citing his atheism, refuses to say a blessing over the bread, and gets thrown out of the house. (It was inspired by a true-life Haim family story they'd told Anderson about.)

"That was the first time [in a while] my whole family was together, because we were shooting during Covid and there were protocols," says Alana. "Sitting at the Shabbat table was actually very heartwarming, but I was terrified my parents were going to tell some embarrassing story, as parents do. But it was great. We were crying with laughter every time my dad said anything to me or my sisters. It was how we grew up."

For the vast majority of the shoot, however, her family wasn't around, and Alana had to find her way creatively without them. "My sisters and I have always been a unit, since birth," she says. "Not having that security blanket of two other human beings was terrifying, but it also felt so great, since I'd always wanted to see if I could even do something on my own."

When she had doubts about that, she turned to Anderson. "I'm sure he got annoyed with me saying 'I don't know if I can do this' constantly," she says. "At the beginning, he was like, 'Of course you can do this!' At the end, he was like, 'Alana, just do the job!' "

"I was a little bit annoyed at the beginning, since fear is absolutely an understandable emotion," says Anderson. "But there comes a certain point where you know someone and you go, 'I've given all my trust to you. And now you gotta go. We're on.' It was exciting when she dropped those insecurities and just started attacking. That's when her ferociousness came out."

That ferociousness involved learning to drive a big-rig truck for an incredible sequence in which Alana and Gary run out of gas after delivering a water bed to the house of real-life movie producer Jon Peters (played in wonderfully deranged fashion by Bradley Cooper) and she maneuvers it backward down a long hill in neutral. She spent months prepping for the scene, since she'd never used a stick shift before, and is a naturally skittish driver. "In the beginning I was shaking," she says. "And by the end of filming the segment, I had my own walkie and was like, 'Copy, we're in first gear. You guys ready for action?' I fully got super into it."

Like most of Anderson's films, *Licorice Pizza* was shot entirely in the Valley. It's home to both Anderson and the Haim sisters, and the're tired of seeing it denigrated as a low-rent alternative to beachfront communities Malibu and Santa Monica. "It was this wondrous dream place in the Forties, where everyone was celebrating this beautiful suburban area that had just emerged out of the dust," says Anderson. "But some time in the Sixties, it started to be uncool to have this *Leave It to Beaver* life. But fuck 'em. They're wrong."

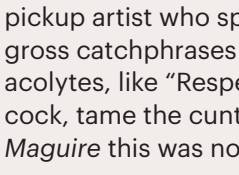
Alana agrees. "It was shocking to me, growing up and hearing people say they didn't like it," she says. "I had no idea. We have [the Mexican restaurant] Casa Vega. We got Art's Deli. We got Ventura Boulevard. What more do you need in life? I think when people started hating it, it made me proud of it. I felt defensive. It's something I love."

The shoot happened to line up with Haim's forced break from the road due to the pandemic, but they've played a handful of gigs in recent months, and they're planning to return to the road next year. Once that happens, Alana expects to resume her old role as the kid sister in the group, despite her newfound status as a movie star. ("The baby of the family is the baby of the family," notes Anderson.)

As for Anderson, he's already thinking about his next movie. "It's impossible not to have a nagging desire to do it again," he says. Can he imagine finding a place for Alana in it, or some future film down the line? "If the question is, 'Would I like to work with Alana again?' the answer is yes," he says. "More than that, I look forward to it."

The Out-of-Left-Field Kids Stay in the Picture

P.T. Anderson has a history of unusual casting choices



Mark Wahlberg
Boogie Nights **1997**
When "Marky Mark" was cast as porn star Dirk Diggler, most people knew him as a one-hit-wonder rapper and Calvin Klein underwear model. It felt like a stunt, but launched the career of one of Hollywood's biggest stars.

Tom Cruise
Magnolia **1999**
Cruise was cast wildly against type in the sprawling epic as a creepy motivational speaker/pickup artist who spews gross catchphrases to his acolytes, like "Respect the cock, tame the cunt." *Jerry Maguire* this was not.

Adam Sandler
Punch-Drunk Love **2002**
Nobody but Anderson would have imagined the goofball *Billy Madison* star could pull off playing a lonely toilet-plunger salesman desperate for love. The move paved the way for other Sandler-led dramas, like *Uncut Gems*.

Joanna Newsom
Inherent Vice **2014**
The indie folk singer had virtually no acting experience when she took the role of stoner Sortilège, as well as the narrator, in this Thomas Pynchon adaptation. It arguably set the stage for Alana Haim's role in *Licorice Pizza*.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP IMAGES; © NEW LINE CINEMA/EVERETT COLLECTION 2; © COLUMBIA PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION; WARNER BROS.

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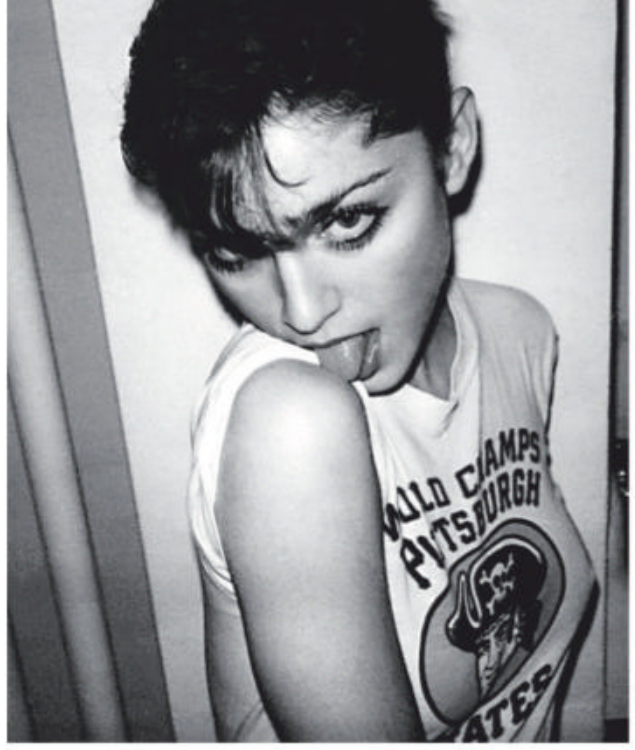

▲ MADONNA

Madonna had only recently moved to New York to become a dancer when Rock took photos of her in 1980. The shoot didn't take long, he'd later recall; she wasn't famous yet, but she knew what to do. "I wasn't telling her, 'Baby, stick your tongue out,'" Rock said. "She did all that. She'd do whatever it takes to get a bit of attention."

◀ DAVID BOWIE

"You just couldn't take a bad picture of David," Rock once said of their collaborations. "I didn't know much about him when I met him. One of the two things David and I exchanged in our first interview was that Syd Barrett was a friend of mine and that David had met Lou and Iggy in New York . . . so we had those three people in common. Imagine *that* conversation in 1972 between two guys in their early twenties."

▼ JOAN JETT

Like Madonna, Rock found Joan Jett, just out of the Runaways, to be "a natural" during the shoot for the cover of her 1981 album, *I Love Rock 'n Roll*. "When that jacket popped up, she's sort of like Elvis Presley with her dark looks," he later recalled. "It was one of the last of her outfits in this shoot, probably taken around 3 a.m."

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS © MICK ROCK

1948-2021

Mick Rock

BLESSED WITH A perfect name at birth, Mick Rock captured the aesthetics of punk and glitter rock like no one else. The photographer, who died in November, shot dozens of iconic Seventies album sleeves: the members of Queen collapsed in a euphoric pile (*Sheer Heart Attack*), Iggy Pop clutching a microphone like an orange Adonis (*Raw Power*), Lou Reed staring off into space (*Transformer*). Rock also captured unforgettable images of Madonna, the Ramones, and Miley Cyrus, and he directed music videos for David Bowie and Paul McCartney.

His storied five-decade career began when the photographer (still going by his full name of Michael David Rock) was a university student in 1968. "I was at the home of a friend who had all the toys, including a great record player and camera," he later recalled. "Sitting around his room, tripping on blotter acid, I picked up the camera and began playing with it." A year later, he captured the casual shot that became the cover of former Pink Floyd singer Syd Barrett's *The Madcap Laughs*. "I'm in the mythology business," Rock once told an interviewer. "That's what interests me – not the truth, not the mundane truth, but a truth that's just more exciting and more fun." KORY GROW

◀ IGGY POP

When Bowie was producing Iggy and the Stooges' *Raw Power* in London in 1972, Rock captured this image at a nearby gig. "Iggy was notoriously crazy, charged up, but not quite drooling," the photographer later recalled of the shoot, which would also yield *Raw Power*'s cover. "Clearly, my photo didn't help sell the album," he joked of the cult-favorite LP. "It wound up in the bargain bin months after the release."

▶ QUEEN

This iconic shot graced the cover of 1974's *Queen II,* and the band re-created it in the video for "Bohemian Rhapsody." "They were very obsessed with looking adorable," Rock recalled. "I remember I had to be up on a ladder and get the right angle, and just as I'd be ready to shoot…we'd have to stop and get the makeup artist."

▲ LOU REED

This mid-Seventies outtake started out as just two friends having fun. "You can see from this photo how he had a sense of humor," Rock later said. "We shot these photos just because we wanted to, then we made a bit of money because they ended up using them for the *Coney Island Baby* album, but they weren't intended for that."

DEBBIE HARRY

"I always thought of Debbie as the Marilyn Monroe of rock & roll," Rock once said. "She was bigger than punk."

LOOK BACK

Bourdain's Secret Diaries

For years, the chef and TV star posted anonymously to a martial-arts forum on Reddit – but he couldn't go undetected for long

By ALEXANDER DARWIN

LAST MAN STANDING
Bourdain in his gi in 2015

HELEN M. CHO

On June 29, 2014, at 8:02 p.m., a user named NooYawkCity made the first of what would come to be many posts to a popular martial-arts forum on reddit.com. It was titled "58 year old white belt":

I've been training about a year, and only recently gotten solidly hooked. From once every few weeks, to once a week to nearly every day. Now it's an obsession. I'm in shit shape, gas early, and of course, hurt like hell after training. Given the limits of any reasonable expectations, am I out of my fucking mind?

Over three years, NooYawkCity posted on the forum, tagged "bjj" for Brazilian jiujitsu, some 80 times. The writing was colorful, ruminative, simultaneously lacerating and humble.

July 9, 2014, 10:29 p.m.

58 years old and getting so gassed during warm ups, that when we start to roll, I end up sticking my own head into an obvious guillotine – just to take a break. An utterly humiliating class yesterday, yet showed up for a private today with 250 lbs of muscle and bone so I could get pounded like a chicken fried steak. Why am I doing this? I don't know. I'm like a dope fiend at this point. If I can't train I start going into withdrawal. Wander around, twitching, restless and pissed off. At least with dope, you feel GOOD afterwards. After training, I feel like a rented and unloved mule. All the other (much, much younger) white belts all seem to be coming back from long breaks because of injury. Strangely enough, so far so good for me. I may feel like a fragile box of stale breadsticks but I've managed to avoid injury (if not discomfort). I have never enjoyed pain. I don't care if it's Gisele Bunchen coming at me in thigh boots wielding a riding crop, I'm not interested. Yet I insist on getting squashed on the mats every day and feel bereft if I can't. This is not normal. When I talk about BJJ, Old friends look at me like

I have an arm growing out of my forehead. But I Won't stop. Can't stop.

Eventually, the distinctive attitude in NooYawkCity's writing started to become recognizable to savvy Redditors. These, they suspected, were the musings of Anthony Bourdain, the celebrated chef, author, and TV star, who died by suicide in 2018 at the age of 61. Bourdain's wife, Ottavia Busia – who had introduced him to Brazilian jiujitsu – later confirmed as much, as has an additional source close to the *No Reservations* host.

While the world had come to know Bourdain's unfiltered writing style, his Reddit posts brought an exceptional sort of candor. NooYawkCity's prose was not going through an editor. This was the truest Anthony Bourdain, writing simply for the sake of it, unburdened by his reputation.

April 22, 2015, 4:12 p.m.

After 45 minutes of sprawls and burpies, it's time for live rolling. Someone puts on Rupert Holmes' "Piña Colada Song" and right away the 270 lb former wrestler who just got dumped by his girlfriend, angrily passes my guard, slaps me into side control and sinks his weight into my jaw. He's wearing a new but filthy Atama gi. It feels like a cheese grater against my cheek as he grinds away at me. I can hear my teeth making terrible sounds and am pretty sure my crowns are going to explode any second. Jabba The Wrestler has been eating at Subway. I can smell rancid, sour, pre-sliced onions on his breath, which, sadly does little to mask the horrifying miasma of swamp ass rising from his sweaty thighs. As my teeth give way, the music changes to Don Mclean's "American Pie". I pray for death but I'm already dead.

Bourdain always seemed extraordinary in his ability to connect with all sorts of people. He squatted for lunch with a sitting U.S. president at a Hanoi eatery, stopped to chat with a fruit seller in a Senegalese open-air market, laughed alongside a leather-clad biker on the side of a Beirut highway. Still, jiujitsu practitioners were privileged to a unique bond with Bourdain during the last several years of his life. While his love affair with the sport was well documented, those who sweated alongside him on the mats really got to know the man in a personal way. Bourdain was not the type of celebrity who stuck to private lessons designed to keep faces unblemished and egos unbruised. Just as he got down and dirty with real people and foods, Bourdain sought the unfiltered BJJ experience – "gen-pop" classes – wherever he went.

Aug. 14, 2014, 8:56 p.m.

Rolled with another white belt today. He knew nothing – which is okay, because I know nothing. But he was built like a freaking dump truck, and was about as graceful. Also, he's a wrestler. What kind of wrestler, I can't imagine. He managed to kick me in the nose, WWE elbow drop onto my stomach, and generally throw me around his cage – when he wasn't just laying on my legs or trying to artlessly squash me with his massive girth. Oh, yeah, he did try and twist my foot off. That was… interesting. I don't think he even attempted a single recognizable jiujitsu technique that I'm aware of – and raising the subject in a helpful way is difficult as he communicates only in monosyllabic grunts and avoids eye contact.

FIGHT CLUB Bourdain training with legendary Brazilian martial-arts black belt Kurt Osiander at Ralph Gracie Jiu Jitsu in San Francisco on Aug. 25, 2015.

What's the polite thing to do here? I sure as shit don't want to roll with this Killdozer again. Do I edge over to the other side of the mat when he approaches? Talk to the professor and beg him to put Godzilla back on Monster Island? Shoot him with a tranquilizer dart so we can track him back to see if there are others of his species? What's the appropriate response to this?

Dec. 23, 2014, 4:41 p.m.

Planning a business trip to Budapest and hope to keep up with my training. Privates or GenPop or both. Anyone have any experiences/suggestions there? […] I read one account that's frankly terrifying – describing massive, obelisk shaped rageaholic manimals punching walls in between neck snappings but hoping that's apocryphal nonsense. Anyone?

Bourdain's devotion to training paid off: In 2016, he competed at the New York Open Brazilian jiujitsu competition and won gold. Meanwhile, NooYawkCity occasionally ventured to some other forums on Reddit. A former addict himself, he slapped down a troll who suggested ex-addict celebrities should participate in a reality show where they are given drugs to relapse on: *You are a terrible human being. You richly deserve to lose sphincter control and seep slowly, steadily and fragrantly into your My Little Pony undies for the rest of your life.*

He commented on Steven Seagal's questionable combat prowess: *Seagal is a "deadly mofo" if you get between him and the all you can eat pasta bar. The hair is definitely deadly though. A wad of that Dynell weave comes undone during a fight with Lightning Chunks of Death and you could choke.*

He weighed in on whether Joe Rogan could beat Wesley Snipes in a fight: *I can tell you from personal experience you do NOT want Rogan's arms anywhere near your neck. He cranks. Hard. And enjoys it while he does it. He'd destroy Snipes. Like hospitalize destroy.*

And after a couple of years, NooYawkCity began to allude to his true identity. In an addiction forum where a user mentioned an all-night drinking session on *Parts Unknown,* he wrote: *It should probably be pointed out that the "one night bender" in Chiang Mai was filmed painstakingly, with multiple set-ups, green screen and lighting schemes, over the course of a full week. Television does not happen in real time.*

In 2016, Bourdain responded to a question about a photo he'd posted to Instagram of his newly mangled cauliflower ear ("painful as fuck"). He also addressed a rumor that Ottavia jokingly bribed him with Vicodin to come with her to BJJ class: *That would be a reasonable assumption. Also the fact of the matter.*

BOURDAIN'S FINAL post on r/bjj was Jan. 5, 2017. His last reference to jiujitsu in an Instagram post, a solemn picture in his gi uniform, came two days later. But Busia confirmed that he continued training, with his last session coming on May 31, 2018, just eight days before he died. It was clear BJJ had a positive influence on Bourdain's life, replacing a host of addictions:

Dec. 12, 2014, 3:16 a.m.

For over 40 years, my life pretty much revolved around drugs. Booze and cigarettes almost the background music to my drugs of choice (heroin and cocaine). Drug free but a drinker until I started BJJ – at which point the inevitability of getting smashed every day made alcohol a much less attractive option and cigarettes out of the question. Frankly, BJJ as an addiction has in many ways replaced my previous ones. If I'm away from my home academy, I find myself looking for someplace anyplace to train like a dope fiend looking for a methadone clinic. My emotional state when deprived of training would, in different circumstances, be called "drug seeking behavior."

But it was also clear that Anthony Bourdain didn't train for a healthier lifestyle. He didn't train to live longer or rid himself of his demons. When his celebrity was at its height and he couldn't walk a street on this planet without getting recognized, jiujitsu gave Bourdain a new, anonymous world to traverse, one where he was just one of us.

Oct. 24, 2014, 12:41 a.m.

I love all of it. The soreness, the carrot fingers, mat burn, the ego-destroying ass kickings, just when you think you're getting somewhere. I'm hooked. I know I will never be young again. I am well aware that I'm only getting slower, more fragile over time. That I will probably never live to see black belt or win any competitions. But I'm pretty sure I will suck a little bit less every month. That while I will never master this skill, will at least, hopefully, get better and better at it. And every once in a great while, I will sweep some young upper belt, or maybe even catch one in a triangle. And that makes me happy.

HELEN M. CHO

ARTIST YOU NEED TO KNOW

Meet the Young Wizard of Michigan Hip-Hop

"BIN REAPER 2," the latest album from BabyTron, opens with a sample from *Harry Potter*. "Scooby-Doo, hopping out the van, gon' leave a mystery," BabyTron raps on the song. "Should've went to Hogwarts, I'm doing wizardry." Specializing in head-spinning bars packed with pop-culture references, BabyTron is part of an ascendant wave of hip-hop out of Michigan. The 21-year-old, born James Johnson, started rapping in high school in Ypsilanti, later making waves alongside a group of his classmates who made music under the name Shitty Boyz. Those early releases garnered BabyTron the classification of "scam rapper," applied to MCs whose criminal enterprise of choice was scamming credit cards and mobile payment apps, a kind of Gen-Z answer to the street hustles of yesteryear. "That's where I came from: scamming," he says. "It's like an origin, it's like me — I can't change me."

Still, the scam-rap descriptor is woefully limited. Tron's expertise is in everything from sports to old movies, to finding inventive ways to inform you that your spouse does not very much care for you. While there's seemingly a formula out there for viral fame, BabyTron's rise feels more akin to the previous generation of rap greats. He's already four years into his career, having come into the game straight out of high school. "Just like with everything, it's one step at a time — I'm not trying to skip no steps," he says. "I'm taking the stairs, not the elevator." **JEFF IHAZA**

10-SECOND BIO

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Ypsilanti, Michigan

MIDWEST MAGIC "I feel like we got the sound that everybody wants right now," Tron says. "Not necessarily me, but the state of Michigan as a whole."

Q&A

Earl Sweatshirt

The rapper on growing up in public, becoming a father, and why he scrapped the first draft of his new album

By JEFF IHAZA

IN 2010, just a few months before the introduction of an app called Instagram, Earl Sweatshirt's debut music video arrived seemingly out of nowhere to launch careers for the brash iconoclasts in Odd Future. The video for "Earl," which paired the frenetic energy of a Harmony Korine film with hints of a more mature emotional sensibility, was a key factor in pushing his rap collective into the mainstream – no small feat given that Earl, born Thebe Kgositsile, was only 16 at the time. The attention that followed was instantaneous, as was the online vitriol directed at Earl's mother after fans discovered that he'd been sent away to a boarding school in Samoa. "People make shit up about you – that was when I realized that," says the rapper, now 27 and a new father. "I answered interview questions, and people that I never met before in my life were like, 'Nah, it doesn't sound like him.'" Over Zoom, Earl discussed his latest LP, *Sick!,* and why he's looking for a fresh start after a decade in music. "It speaks to the cycle of 10," he says. "Only so much can happen between one and 10 before the restart, you know what I mean?"

How did you approach this new album?
I was very skeptical of myself – but I'm skeptical of me saying it that way, because "skeptical" doesn't capture exactly what I'm talking about. I had a goal, which was to meet people halfway.

Why was that your goal?
Because I wasn't about to catch myself doing the same shit for too long. You can't do that. I scrapped a 19-track album.

Because it sounded too similar to what you've done before?
Yes, and I ain't going to lie, that shit was like . . . I was rapping, rapping, on every single song. But my whole thing is grading things on the truth, you know what I mean? However expansive or detailed the truth is. The album I was working on before had a really optimistic energy towards it, but it felt gross. It felt political, like a mayoral campaign.

What about the album you ended up with? What stands out to you about it, on a personal level?
The life that went into this shit. This one hurt.

You've been out of the public eye for a minute. How would you sum up the past few years in your life?
Oh, bro. I have the smartest and strongest little son now. I can't even begin to explain that shit. How do you explain? It's like he opened me back up to a lot of emotions that I thought I was beyond.

Your first single from this project is called "2010." Looking back at that moment when people harassed your mom online, did any of that come up for you as you became a father?
Yes. Having a child makes you reckon with yourself, because your job is to protect them, and so you audit yourself differently. You're way more honest with yourself about who you've been in your life once you have a child, because you're like, "Oh, shit. This nigga might do that." It's massive, and it is ongoing. I'm still learning, man.

How much of that went into what you rap about on the album?
A lot, but at the same time, I don't have an "I love you, son" song on the joint. I'm not going to sit here and lie to you, bro – I'm a young dude. I had a weird beginning to my adulthood. As a kid, and when I went away and shit, a thing that I had to fight for was my sense of self and my own voice, because I was the type of nigga to put that away for the group, because I had self-esteem issues and shit. A thing that was hard-fought for me was my own voice. I patted myself on the back for being able to say, "Yo, I'm hungry."

So this has been another crash course in the fact that this shit ain't about me no more. As much as it is me, it's the maintenance of me so that the person that learns from me the most isn't learning a whole bunch of bullshit. The practice of sacrifice.

How much guilt do you have to contend with around having so much of your family life aired out in the public eye?
I was guilty about it until I was like, "All right, I got to do something about this shit." That's been a fucking eight-, nine-year process. I put that shit into myself so I had something to be proud of, and so that there's a trail of crumbs for these niggas, bro. That's the sense that I made of why I had to do everything that I did. All of this shit is to show that right now in time, niggas need to do this for real. Because niggas are seeing right now the limits of an aesthetic. Without even getting into specifics, if you're smart, you're going to pick up on what I'm saying. An aesthetic is an aesthetic until that shit is real life.

As you put this album out, what do you see as the future? What do the next 10 years look like for you?
Wow. You know what? If everything goes right, I'm going to be on a farm, because this music is cool, but I need to put my fucking hands on something. I just had this conversation with someone. Tech is going to push people back to the land, no doubt about it. It's more expensive in the city. Everyone else that doesn't have money to live in that zone is going to be on the outskirts. To me, it seems like things are on the verge of getting communal around this motherfucker, man.

RYOSUKE TANZAWA

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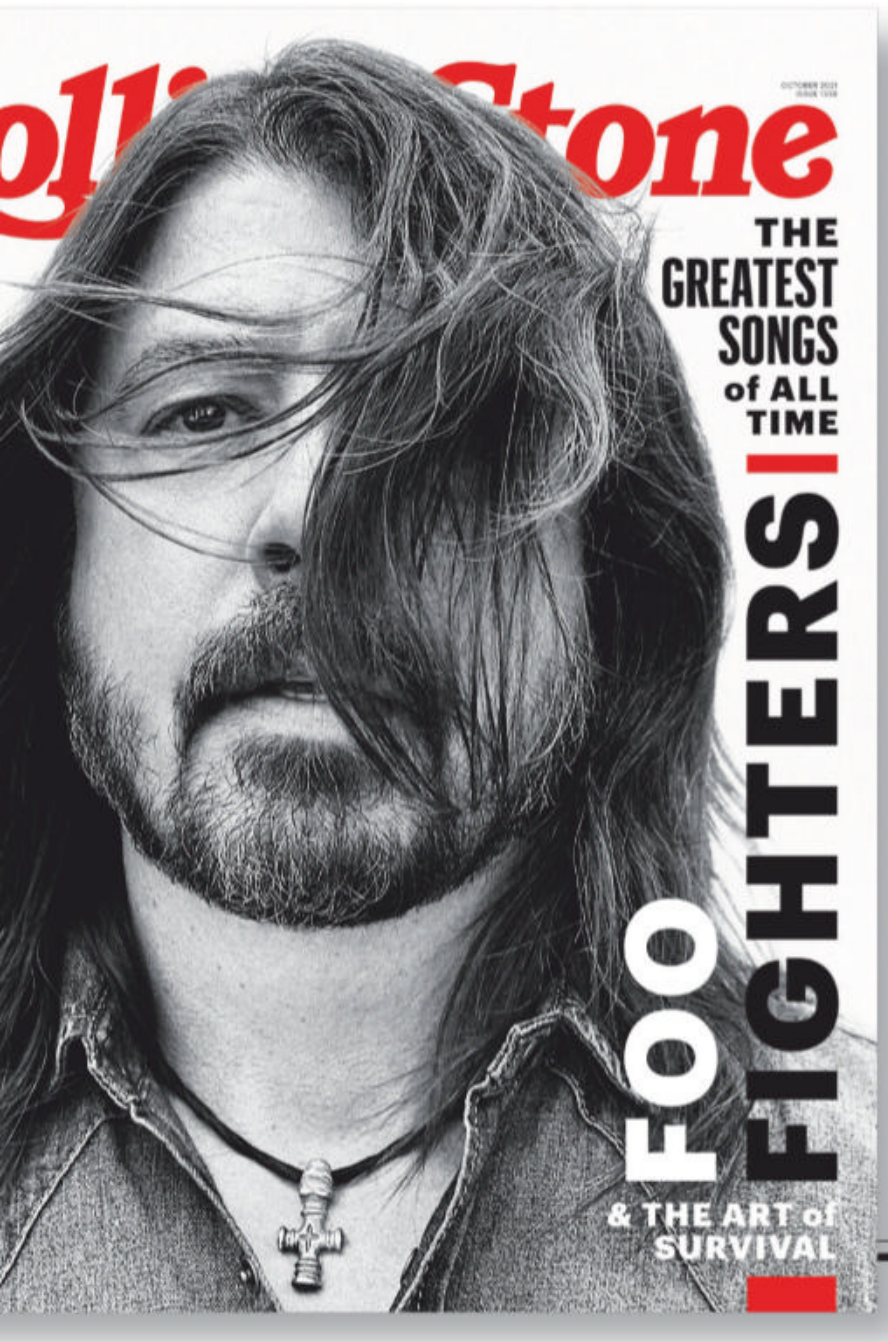

THE GREATEST SONGS of ALL TIME
FOO FIGHTERS
& THE ART of SURVIVAL

Doja Cat

BY EJ DICKSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KANYA IWANA

DGAF

If You Read This*

(*OR AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT SHE WANTS YOU TO THINK)

p. 26

I AM SITTING WITH Doja Cat in an Airbnb in Universal City, California, listening to a punk cover of "I Saw Her Standing There" and polishing off the toothsome lobster-caviar rolls she made. She's talking about an ex-boyfriend and puffing on her omnipresent highlighter-colored tobacco vape ("I don't crave many things other than this stupid thing. That's pretty much it. Chocolate, sex, and vape"). All of a sudden, after about an hour of chatting about her last album and past relationships, she looks down at her Minnie Mouse-encased iPhone and excuses herself to go to the bathroom.

For a few minutes, I'm standing in the kitchen, scribbling notes, cleaning up lobster meat, and trying to figure out the automatic trash can, when she comes back and calls out, "My throat and nose are really fucked up." Her managers (she has four, two of whom have been hanging out in another room on the premises) scurry into the kitchen as if summoned by conch shell.

"Is everything OK?" I ask.

"Yeah, everything's great," she says. "I appreciate it. Really, I do." And she disappears.

We had planned to have dinner and hang out for a few hours at an Airbnb her team had rented for the occasion. ("They wanted me to be like, 'This is the place I'm staying at,' but I'm not staying here. It's just an Airbnb. I didn't want anyone in my house. No offense," she says as she chops chives on a cutting board).

Doja had confessed to being run ragged by her schedule. She played the Day N Vegas festival two nights before, then flew back to L.A. for her manager's birthday party, arriving late and needing to do some shots to catch up. Today she's wildly hungover, and we'd commiserated about being on our periods. (Later, on Zoom, I learn she had been running a high fever.) One of her managers mentions she's taking Doja to the doctor before handing me a carton of artisanal water. "Take this for the road," she says.

Doja would love to be in the studio making music, but she's unable to do so because, "I'm doing all this other shit." There are, in fact, mountains of that other shit now that Doja is on the precipice of superstardom. Doja spent years in relative obscurity, releasing a critically acclaimed yet widely ignored debut before blowing up during the early days of the pandemic with "Say So," a flawless disco-inspired track off her second album, *Hot Pink,* that went viral on TikTok and became her first Number One hit. In June, Doja released the excellent *Planet Her,* a cavalcade of wall-to-wall bangers that vacillates seamlessly from sultry Afropop ("Woman") to polished Top 40 jams ("You Right," "I Don't Do Drugs") to the R&B throwback "Need to Know," which Doja tells me she wrote when she was drunk in the studio. In November, she received eight Grammy nominations, the second most of any other artist for the year.

She has all the markers of pop superstardom: the high-gloss music videos (she writes most of the treatments herself); the makeup line; the bevy of brand deals; the award-show appearances decked in Gaultier and Thom Browne; the calls from *Vogue* to do makeup and skin-care tutorials; the cadre of managers; the creative director and choreographer and videographer and other assorted team members. Even her two cats, Alex and Ray, have become famous, though not famous enough that they were allowed to play themselves in the music video for "Get Into It (Yuh)," which features Doja's cat being kidnapped by an evil alien overlord. (Doja's team held a casting call to play her cat in the video; she decided to pick a "funny-looking one with really dirty, crazy eyes.")

One thing she says she could do without: being interviewed. Despite her bombastic tantric-sex alien persona, those in her circle say she's an introvert. In person, she is polite yet circumspect. When I first meet her, at a studio in North Hollywood, where she's rehearsing a video for "Get Into It (Yuh)," she leans in for a hug, but it's the type of hug you get at your 10th-anniversary reunion from a college nemesis who is palpably disappointed you didn't get fat.

"It's cool when it's a hot guy asking you questions, or someone, like, you're hooking up [with], who's like, 'So what was your favorite thing when you were in high school?' " she says. "[But] if you just want to chill out and just, like, fuckin' vibe all day, and then you have to get out of bed to go somewhere and have people ask you questions that you've been asked, it's a little exhausting."

DOJA CAT'S MANAGEMENT team offers two explanations for her success. The first is her undeniable technical gifts and staggering versatility as a rapper and vocalist. "You don't see any rappers doing punk-rock songs like 'Bottom Bitch.' You don't see them using Paul Anka as a sample," says her manager Lydia Asrat. On a track like the breakup anthem "Ain't Shit," for instance, Doja vacillates from a husky growl to anime-character falsetto in a manner of seconds; listening to her is like watching Robin Williams do stand-up in the Seventies. She says she likes to imagine herself guesting as her own "alter ego" when she writes verses: "I think it turns songs into more like rides or experiences."

Ironically, her versatility is something of a point of contention among hip-hop fans, who obsess over whether she should be classified as a rapper or as a pop artist. She correctly views this as the type of argument "that children on Twitter like to have, but nobody in the real world really cares to talk about." But such criticism also clearly wounds her. "Anyone who says that I'm not a rapper is in denial," she says. "They don't know what they're talking about."

The second explanation for Doja's massive success is her willingness to be wacky and unpredictable in an age of polished, hyper-image-focused pop stardom. (It's hard to imagine, say, Doja's collaborator and friend Ariana Grande sticking French fries up her nose and rapping about breastfeeding Old McDonald, as Doja did with her 2018 viral hit "Mooo!") On her Instagram Lives, she'll twerk in beige cat ears, which she proclaims she bought "for sensual reasons"; on TikTok, she'll make fun of gravelly voiced himbos and dance seductively in a Ron Weasley wig; and on Twitter, she's the consummate shitposter, regularly posting tweets such as "peepee vagina" and "my ass is foul."

Then there are also the less innocuous social media posts, the ones that have gotten her in trouble throughout her career: the time she used homophobic slurs to describe rappers Earl Sweatshirt and Tyler, the Creator, for instance, or a leaked video from a room in Tinychat rumored to be associated with white supremacists, in which Doja can be seen rolling around suggestively on a bed and saying the n-word, a controversy famously summarized by rapper N.O.R.E. as Doja being "in racial chat rooms showing feet." (There is no evidence the other members of the chatroom were, in fact, white supremacists.) More recently, she lobbed insults at fans who lambasted her for attending Kendall Jenner's birthday party during the pandemic, saying in a now-deleted tweet, "Shut the fuck up hag" to one who criticized her behavior.

These behaviors have given Doja a reputation for being Extremely Online, though that's a characterization she refutes: "I definitely was a kid of the internet," she says, "and now I've backed away from it. . . . Unless I'm lonely or alone, and then I go on Twitter and fucking fire off tweets for two hours straight."

But the lack of filter has only partially translated in her recent work, which is more polished than her quirky online presence would suggest. "At first it was really easy to originally compare her to SoundCloud rappers, and it was like, 'She raps. She must be like Nicki or she must be like Cardi,' " says her manager Josh Kaplan. "I think she's different. I've always seen her as more of a Lady Gaga type."

Doja's team views her ability to project authenticity online as something of a competitive advantage. When most artists found themselves at a loss for what to do during the pandemic, Doja was constantly on Instagram Live, making music, asking Alexa to "play the sounds of Forest Whitaker taking a shit," playing *Fortnite,* and announcing when she had the runs to her devoted fans. "She's a master of the internet," says Doja's manager Gordan Dillard. "That's one of the three to four things that put her above other artists during that pandemic. . . . The artists who knew how to work the internet were the artists who won during that time frame."

Doja has won, her team insists, largely by being herself. But it's unclear whether the edgelord who tells her fans to shut the fuck up on Twitter can necessarily be synonymous with the pop starlet firmly ensconced in the star-making ma-

Senior writer EJ DICKSON *wrote about David Dobrik in the July-August issue.*

FASHION DIRECTION BY ALEX BADIA. PRODUCED BY BRITTANY BROOKS. HAIR BY JSTAYREADY AT CHRIS AARON MANAGEMENT. NAILS BY SACCIA LIVINGSTON. MAKEUP BY ERNESTO CASILLA AT OPUS BEAUTY USING PAT MCGRATH LABS. SET DESIGN BY ROBERT ZIEWER. STYLING BY BRETT ALAN NELSON FOR THE ONLY AGENCY. PREVIOUS SPREAD: DRESS BY ALEJANDRA ALONSO ROJAS. EARRINGS BY ARCHIVE MARGIELA. RINGS BY MAM AND ROSEARK. BANGLES BY ALEXIS BITTAR. OPPOSITE PAGE AND NEXT SPREAD: OUTFIT BY KNWLS. EARRING BY WASEE. RINGS BY GERMAN KABIRSKI.

Doja likes to imagine herself guesting as her *OWN "ALTER EGO" WHEN SHE WRITES:* "I think it turns songs into more like rides."

chine. It's also unclear at what cost Doja is willing to keep winning.

MOST PEOPLE IN Doja Cat's immediate circle don't call her Doja. (Her stage name, a nod to both her love of felines and her love of weed, is a source of some consternation for her: She has tried a few times over the years to change it and was persuaded otherwise by a former manager. "My image was the pothead hippie girl, and I'm not that," she says. "[*SNL*] made a joke the other day that Doja Cat sounds like a *Pokémon*. And, you know, it didn't hurt my feelings, but it definitely hurt my feelings.") They call her Amala, as in Amala Dlamini, her real name.

The younger child of graphic designer Deborah Sawyer and South African actor and dancer Dumisani Dlamini, Doja moved to Rye, New York, to live with her mother's mother, a Jewish architect and painter. (They were not particularly observant; Doja says she grew up eating lobster and celebrating Christmas.)

Growing up, Doja had no interaction with her father, and though they have since connected on social media, she has never met him in person. All she knew was what she remembers her mother telling her: that they'd met in New York while he was performing on Broadway, had had a brief relationship, that he was too busy traveling and touring to spend time with her and her brother. "I felt confused, a little bit," she recalls. "It's a little strange to see everybody else with their dad, and you didn't even really have one."

Gabrielle Hames, one of Doja's childhood best friends, says growing up without a father impacted Doja tremendously. "She would always think her dad was coming, and he didn't come," says Hames. "She'd say, 'My dad is gonna come, he lives in Africa, he's just performing,' and he wouldn't come."

When Doja was about eight, Deborah, who would later go by the Sanskrit name Ishwari, packed up the family and drove across the country to relocate to the Sai Anantam Ashram, a commune in the Santa Monica Mountains led by jazz legend Alice Coltrane. Deborah wanted to move to the mountains to get some peace and quiet, but this did not particularly jibe with Doja, who describes herself as a "hyper" kid. "It was very restraining," she says of the ashram. "My brother liked it. He had a lot of friends. But I didn't have many friends. For me, it was just like, 'I can't eat what I want to eat. I can't really do kid stuff.' Like, God forbid you don't have a scarf on your shoulders."

The family eventually moved to Oak Park, an upper-middle-class suburb of Los Angeles, where Deborah befriended and started making jewelry with Hames' mother. Hames' older sister, Alexis Haines, occasionally babysat for Doja and her brother. (The sisters would later be featured on the E! Reality TV series *Pretty Wild,* and Haines served one month in jail for her involvement in the Bling Ring celebrity-robbery scandal.) "We were a little bit more of the latchkey kids," says Haines. "We had these hippie moms and were given probably more freedom than kids should have been."

Doja and her brother were one of the few, if not the only, mixed-race kids where they grew up. "I looked different. My hair was different," she says. "People were very racist and very rude and unhinged and weird." Most of her friends growing up were white and Jewish, she says, and her brother used to make fun of her for not having Black friends. Haines remembers that Doja would constantly beg her to flat-iron her hair.

According to Haines, Doja's brother's behavioral issues "took up a lot of space in that household." "There may not have been space for [Doja's] feelings," Haines says. "She had other outlets and avenues and ways of trying to get attention, but she was a good kid, a sweet kid."

It was while Haines was babysitting Doja that she started rapping, posting verses on Haines' MySpace. Doja had grown up with music: Her brother often played 50 Cent and Nas, her mom loved Erykah Badu and Earth, Wind, and Fire, and many afternoons at the ashram they'd participate in ecstatic-chanting services. "I knew that I could rap. That was the first thing I knew in my heart I could do," she says.

She did not feel the same way about singing, which still makes her self-conscious. Her aunt, a vocal coach, taught her breath control by having her sing in front of a candle without moving the flame, and she was able to successfully prepare for her audition to the same Los Angeles performing-arts high school her brother had attended (she sang "Part of Your World" from *Little Mermaid*).

When she was 16, Doja dropped out of high school, which she has attributed to her struggles with ADHD. "It felt like I was stuck in one spot and everybody else was progressing constantly," she says. She's said this was a period of artistic awakening for her, a time when she became obsessed with the sound of her voice layered on top of beats. But it also seems like a difficult time. "I definitely didn't like to leave my room. I don't know if I was agoraphobic, but I definitely thought that I was at the time," she says. "It was very, very hard for me to go outside, but then there was a period where all I did was go outside to get the fuck out of the house and it didn't matter where I was going," she says. She smoked a lot of weed, scoured YouTube for beats, and posted songs she made, including "So High," a wispy, Ambien-tripping dream-pop anthem that caught the attention of the man who would become her longtime producer, Yeti Beats.

Today, Doja cringes when she listens to "So High" – "It's some of the laziest lyrics I've ever written," she says. But Yeti heard the song and was "blown away" by her talent. "The recording wasn't great, but this girl's voice was so crazy," he recalls. He started shuttling her to his studio in Echo Park to record, immediately recognizing that the studio served as an oasis of sorts for Doja to escape from the turmoil at home. "I don't know if she would want me saying this, but she was a shut-in," he says. "The studio was a safe place for her. I had this feeling we'd met for a reason, and I tried my hardest to bring her to the studio every day and give her a place to feel creative and go."

Through Yeti's connections, Doja signed with Kemosabe Records, an imprint of RCA helmed by pop-music magnate Dr. Luke. In 2014, Kemosabe released her debut EP, *Purrr!*. "So High" gave Doja her first taste of mainstream success, as well as her first taste of internet outrage when people criticized the Hindu imagery she'd used in the music video. At the time, she pointed out that she practiced Hinduism as a child and was inspired by her time on the ashram, but in retrospect, she regrets the video. "If I knew not to do that, I probably wouldn't have done it," she says. "When something is so sacred to many people, I think it's good to be more sensitive about it and just kind of back away."

Over the next few years, Doja was stuck in something of a creative limbo. Though she continued to tour and make music, she was smoking too much weed, she says, and was "very unhealthy and needed a break." (She has since quit cannabis: "I don't do any drugs. I just drink way too much," she says.) "She stopped making music for a while. She was finding herself, and the label wasn't paying much attention to her," says her former lawyer and manager, Josh Kaplan.

It's probably not a coincidence that this period coincided with Dr. Luke's legal battle with Kesha, which became public shortly after Doja signed with Kemosabe. (A representative for Dr. Luke declined to comment on this topic.) Of all the controversies dogging Doja's career, her association with a man Kesha accused in a lawsuit of drugging and raping her is perhaps the most notable. His resurgence – he was nominated for a Grammy in 2020 for his work on "Say So," and has three more nominations this year, two of them for work on *Planet Her* – is unquestionably tied to Doja's success. (Dr. Luke has denied Kesha's allegations and sued her for defamation. Kesha dropped her lawsuit in 2016; Dr. Luke's lawsuit is ongoing.)

Doja has not publicly commented on her relationship with Dr. Luke, though she has tweeted appreciatively at fans defending her from criticism for working with him and liked tweets asserting she signed with him before the Kesha allegations became public in early 2014. (Instagram

"Anyone who says that I'm *NOT A RAPPER IS IN DENIAL.* They don't know what they're *TALKING ABOUT."*

OPPOSITE PAGE: BRACELETS BY ALEXIS BITTAR. EARRINGS, NECKLACES, AND RINGS BY DAVID WEBB.

posts on Yeti's account appear to show Doja and Yeti taking meetings with RCA in the spring of 2013.) Luke has writing credits on such hits as "Best Friend," Saweetie's female-empowerment anthem featuring Doja; Saweetie has said the songs she produced with Dr. Luke were part of her bundle deal with RCA, and she's indicated she has no plans to work with him again in the future.

I ask Doja whether she feels the same as Saweetie, i.e., if she will continue to work with him in the future. At first, she is reticent: "That's not a question I feel really comfortable answering," she says, then pauses. "I haven't worked with him in a very long time," she finally says. "A lot of those songs were…" She pauses again. "There's shit that he's credited for, where I'm like, 'Hmm, I don't know, I don't know if you did anything on that.'"

"Like what?" I ask.

"It doesn't matter," she says. "The point is he's gotten some credit for shit. And, you know, it's whatever. I don't think I need to work with him again. I don't think I need to work with him in the future. I know that." She pauses. "I think it was definitely nice of me to work with him," she says, emitting a dry chuckle. (Reached for comment, a representative for Dr. Luke wrote that "Luke is very proud of Amala (Doja Cat) and the work they have done together," and that Luke has "written a uniquely large amount of hits and career-defining songs, and continues to do so. As it is his daily work, his practice, as is the industry's, is to receive publishing when he creates songs.")

A few weeks later, Doja sends a follow-up statement regarding her comments on Luke. "I wanted to clarify something that I had been thinking about since the interview," she wrote in an email sent through a representative. "When asked about Luke I may have said something that someone could interpret as me saying that he had taken credit on things he didn't deserve to. I just want to be clear that I have no firsthand knowledge of that being the case and I don't want to participate in the rumor mill. The credits on my music are accurate, and I don't want to imply anything else."

She added that her previous comments were borne out of her "sensitivities in the past about certain people attributing my general success to the work of others – in particular, men." She continued, "As a young woman I think it is always important to fight for the credit that we are all due, and that was the point I was trying to make there."

In 2018, right after releasing *Amala,* Doja Cat was frustrated. Her old manager at Roc Nation had quit, and her label had little idea what to do with her. Then, shortly before Doja was set to go on tour for *Amala,* producer Troy Noka sent her a sample of Wes Montgomery's "Polka Dots and Moonbeams," asking her to make a beat for his album. She had just gotten a cow costume in the mail to wear on her tour, and she used the sample to start writing "Mooo!" on Instagram Live with fans. Then she shot the video, using her childhood bedroom to make an impromptu green screen. The result, showing her in a crop top eating a cheeseburger and dancing in front of bouncing anime breasts, is quintessential Doja: one part titillating, one part absurd, and a genuine example of her verbal virtuosity.

"Mooo!" was not Doja's only novelty song: She had also released "Nintendhoe," the hook of which features Doja's pornographic moaning ("We thought 'Nintendhoe' would be the thing that blew her up,'" Asrat tells me), and she'd later release the laconic single "Waffles Are Better Than Pancakes" (featuring the hypnotic outro "Fuck pancakes/They taste like shit"). When I ask Doja if it bothers her that a novelty song about being a sexy cow is what got her label to take her seriously, she says it does not. "I knew that it was goofy. It's very blatantly a joke. But I also wanted it to musically sound good to people, and it does."

The success of "Mooo!" irrefutably proved that she was a marketable artist. "It was kind of an eye-opener," says Yeti. "We'd been working on 'serious' music, but people love who she is, so let's lean into that more."

Hot Pink further cemented Doja's status as a pop jack-of-all-trades. "I remember playing the album for the whole RCA team and they were like, 'Oh, shit,'" says Kaplan. "Everyone knew as soon as they heard it. People I'd met several times all of a sudden remembered my name." The album inspired numerous trends on TikTok, especially during the early months of the pandemic; the sultry "Streets," for instance, spawned TikTok's Silhouette Challenge, in which users pose provocatively in a doorway bathed in a red filter.

And then there's "Say So," a disco-pop-rap hybrid inspired by Nile Rodgers' guitar work on "Good Times." "Say So" helped kick off a mid-pandemic resurgence of escapist, frothy disco pop and prompted the creation of a coquettish viral dance on TikTok (Doja later cast the creator, Haley Sharpe, in the video for the song). Doja says the song came from her "mumbling" the lyrics and the melody after she received the beat, noodling around on Logic in her room at her mom's house. Dr. Luke is also credited on the track as a co-writer and the song's sole producer, the latter credit under the pseudonym "Tyson Trax." Those credits, one music-industry insider says, are basically single-handedly responsible for the resurgence of his career: He has since worked with DaBaby and the Kid LaRoi, as well as Saweetie. "He's back to producing superstars again. And

OUTFIT BY KNWLS. EARRING BY WASEE. RINGS BY GERMAN KABIRSKI. SHOES BY JUANITA.

the only hit he had that year was 'Say So,' " the industry insider says.

Doja has developed something of a complicated relationship to this song for other reasons; one viral clip shows Doja rolling her eyes during a performance of the song. "It just became a very sad and repetitive and underwhelming thing for me," she says of performing 'Say So' on Zoom during the pandemic. "[There] was a point where I was like, 'God, I can't wait to perform this'; then all of a sudden I am performing one of my favorite songs off the album, but I'm not even able to do it for my fans in real life. So now there's this negative connotation behind it, like, 'Well, fuck, I can't even live the dream that I had for "Say So," really.' . . . So that kind of fucked me up a little bit."

THE PANDEMIC was a boon to Doja Cat's career, but it also brought her a lot of unwanted attention: specifically, to her history of edgelord behavior online. In 2018, for instance, after fans unearthed old tweets of her using the f-word, her initial response was to double down, tweeting, "I called a couple people faggots when I was in high school in 2015 does this mean I don't deserve support? I've used faggot roughly like 15 thousand times in my life." (She later deleted the tweet and issued a more polished apology.)

At the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, after the "racial chatrooms showing feet" controversy, people online became further incensed after finding one of Doja's old SoundCloud tracks, 2015's "Dindu Nuffin," a reference to a 4chan slur for Black victims of police brutality. "Unfortunately, what's happening here isn't that uncommon for Black people who grew up in predominantly white spaces," writer Damon Young of the Root wrote about "Dindu Nuffin" and the Tinychat controversy. "Whiteness – particularly the cool and edgy white boys – is fetishized, and to assimilate, some flatten themselves into the Black kid who isn't offended by slurs and can be just as edgy as they are." When I ask about the controversies, she declines to get into it. "I've talked about this many times in the past, and I feel like all of that's been pretty thoroughly explained, and I don't need to talk about it anymore," she says.

In a PR-approved statement from 2020, as well as a less-filtered Instagram Live, Doja admitted to spending a great deal of time in her youth in online chatrooms, but denied being "involved in any racist conversations" on Tinychat, calling anyone who referred to her online friends as white supremacists "fucking stupid." She also says "Dindu Nuffin" was her attempt to reclaim the term after having it thrown at her by white people in chatrooms. "I'm a Black woman," she wrote in her statement. "Half of my family is Black from South Africa and I'm very proud of where I come from."

"Nobody cares you're upset *ABOUT SOMETHING,"* SHE says of social media. "It's fun *TO JUST BE A GOOFY GUY."*

To some extent, much of Doja's older online behavior can be attributed to a teenager's tendency toward provocation. An old Facebook profile that appears to have been operated by Doja does reflect a predilection toward casual homophobia – "#gayassnigga" she hashtags one 2012 post mocking her brother for rapping along to Lil' Kim – but mostly it's just a repository of selfies and druggie memes and 8-bit-aesthetic Tumblr art; a portrait of a kid who's just trying to find her shit out.

But Doja's edgelord tendencies have continued to resurface throughout her career. At the beginning of the pandemic, she went viral for appearing to undermine the seriousness of the virus, saying on Instagram Live, "Bitch, I'm not scared of a coronavirus or the motherfucking beer version of that shit. I'm gonna get corona and then I'm gonna get a Corona, 'cause I don't give a fuck about corona, bitch. It's a flu!"

"That was just a way to lighten the mood," she says when I ask about her Covid comments. "It wasn't something to make light of, and I guess I didn't see the immensity of it and how dangerous it's been and devastating. I think it was me just being like a dumb fucking idiot on Live."

Many in Doja's orbit say her inability to censor herself is one of the many things that makes her eminently relatable. "She'll just say crazy stuff," says Noka. "If anyone wants to talk trash on that they can. But I'm sure in the dark they admire that." When I ask Doja's manager Dillard about her getting in trouble on social media, he frames it as road bumps on the path to superstardom: "When you're dealing with a real artist, everyone makes mistakes. Everyone says things. I would be lying to you if I said there wasn't nervousness [about her being online]. But Doja's growing into an adult. She's maturing. She's a human being. And I can never be mad at her for being herself. She is who she is."

The idea that Doja Cat struggles with internalized racism has dogged her throughout her career. Nas referenced the controversy in his 2020 track "Ultra Black," referring to himself as "unapologetically Black" and "the opposite of Doja Cat." This seems like an egregious criticism to level against a woman who is biracial, and as a result has consistently been in the position of having to defend her Blackness to the rest of the world. At first, she denies that such criticism has much of an effect on her: "It didn't hurt me. It was just like, 'Oh, this sucks. This is no good.' " But as she talks about it more, it's clear that it has wounded her.

"It's just like, 'This is a human being, a real human being with feelings,' " she says. "[I] don't think it had anything to do with me, to be honest. I think whatever [Nas] was talking about was something that other people kind of planted into his mind. [But] if you're able to reach that conclusion about me so confidently, there's no point in ever talking about it. . . . I'm also very nonconfrontational, and I don't like the vibe of trying to prove myself to somebody that I don't need to. I don't think I really need to respond to that without humor." And indeed, she did: When she teased the misandrist "Ain't Shit" on Instagram in the summer of 2020, she initially introduced it as "N.A.S."

This kind of flippancy serves a protective purpose. The idea that nothing matters and no one really cares has allowed Doja to thrive as a shitposter and helped her deflect criticism. "My formula for Twitter is to tweet something that has little to no meaning, or if you have something meaningful, to say it," and then undercut it with a joke, she explains. "I think Idles is one of the best punk bands in the world. So I made that apparent. And the next tweet was, like, 'boobs' or something," she says by way of an example. "[Honestly] I think it's better to tweet the shitpost than it is to tweet anything that means anything, because who fucking cares? Nobody cares."

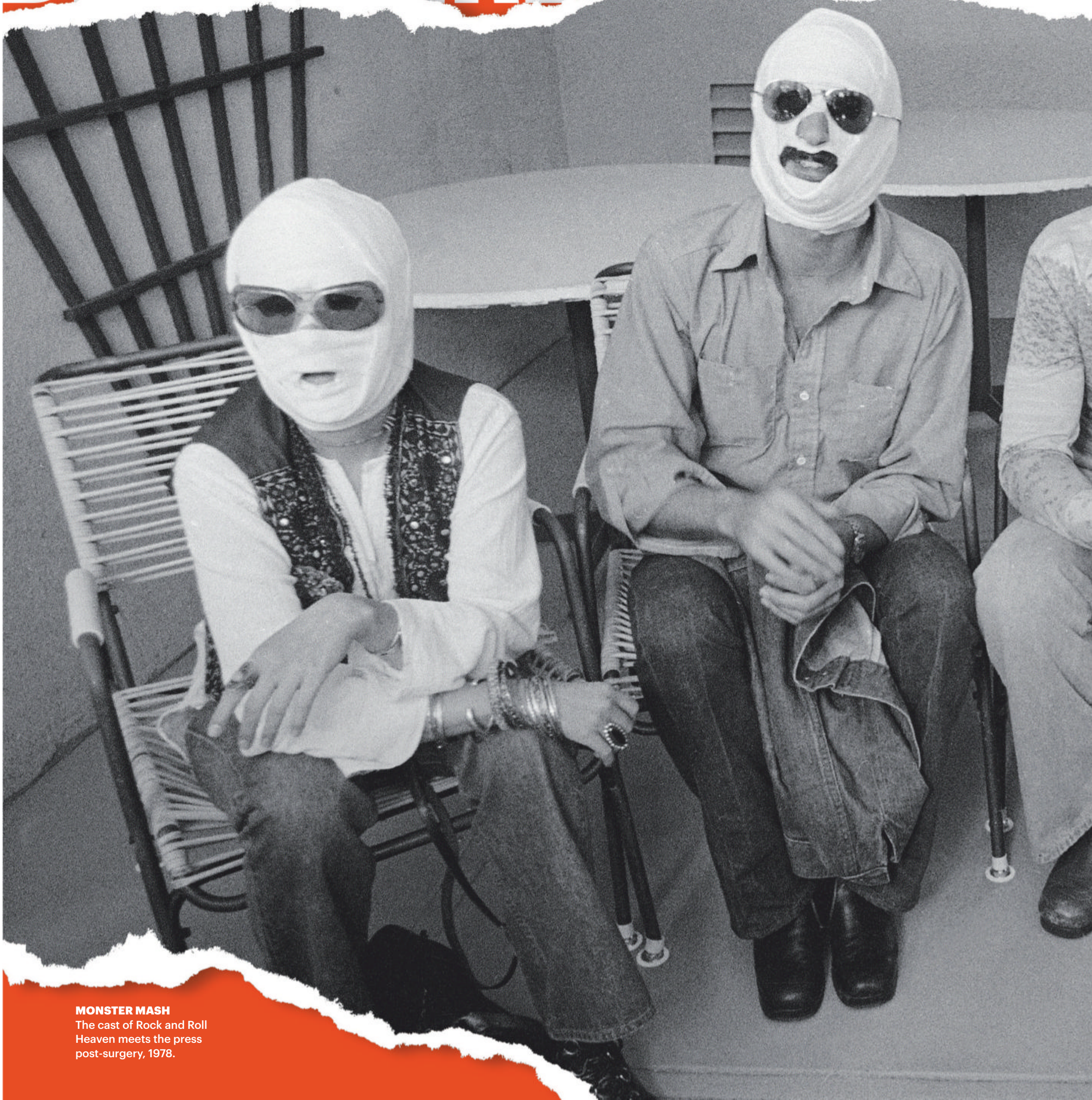
She's talking about her social media strategy, but it's hard not to think she's talking about her public persona as well, which can best be summarized by one of the verses on "Get Into It (Yuh)," which plays on a loop she lip-syncs to as she rehearses the steps for the accompanying music video: "You just wanna party/You just want a lap dance/You just wanna pop up on these clowns like you're the Batman/You just wanna ball out in designer with your best friends."

Doja feels there is an unfair conception of her as "a vapid rapper girl with boobs and ass, and I have no opinions. You see someone on a screen, and they're putting on an act and doing a thing for a camera, and you're like, 'Oh, that's how they are all the time.' It's a shallow way to think, that the person on the TV is nothing but a glob of pixels doing clown shit," she tells me.

Publicly, at least, she's almost comically averse to espousing any preexisting set of politics or agenda. When I first meet her, she's wearing a baggy sweater with the words "Leonard Peltier is innocent" on it, but says she doesn't know who Leonard Peltier is and just likes the shirt because it's Vivienne Westwood. (To be fair, I had to look this up, too: He's an indigenous-rights activist incarcerated since 1977 on charges related to the deaths of two FBI agents killed in a protest siege. He's always maintained his innocence.) Though she donated $100,000 to the Justice for Breonna Taylor fund after the "Dindu Nuffin" controversy, Doja doesn't use social media to broadcast any specific political views.

"I've never really been interested in politics," she tells me on Zoom. "It just seems like a boring issue. My brain just doesn't attach to that. I'm more of, I don't know, a doodling kind of person. I like to doodle and dance and just get through my day." Of President Biden's per- [*Cont. on 78*]

DR. FRANKENSTEIN'S

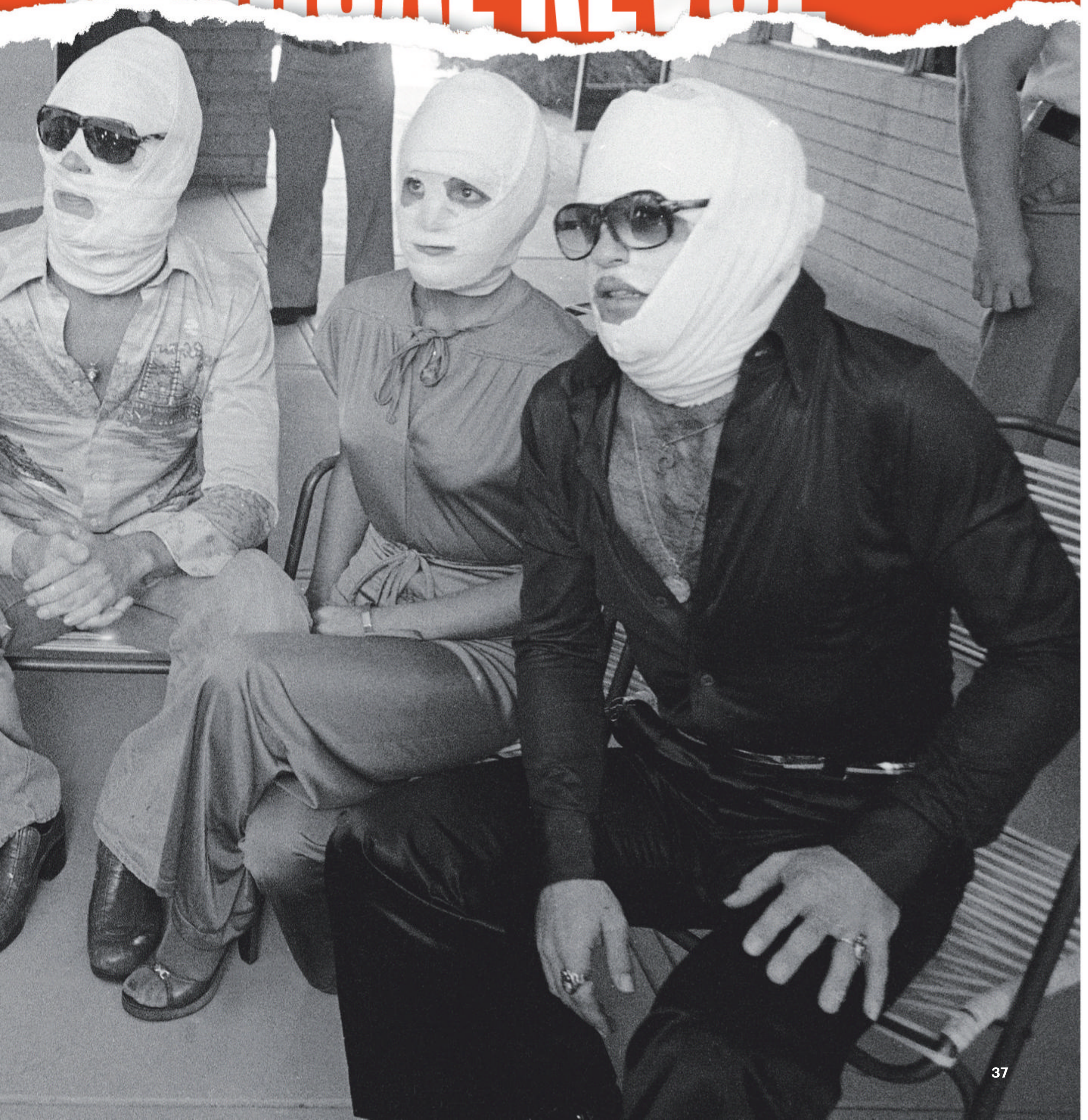


MONSTER MASH
The cast of Rock and Roll Heaven meets the press post-surgery, 1978.

MUSICAL REVIE

How a '70s mastermind used plastic surgery to stage rock's weirdest-ever resurrection

BY DAVID BROWNE



ELVIS PRESLEY had been dead for six months when the plastic-surgeon's knife plunged into Dennis Wise. There Wise lay, on a table in an Orlando hospital, surrounded by photos of the King. He knew what was coming, but the reality of it didn't really hit him until the doctor, who seemed like a nice enough guy, started carving into his face. "All of a sudden, it started hurting real bad," Wise recalls. "He said, 'Give me something!' and a nurse came over and plunged this needle into me." Wise soon went under.

When he woke up, his swollen face wrapped in bandages, Wise had implants in his cheeks and a curled-up lip, and he was on his way to resembling the King more than his 23-year-old self. For the first and not last time, his boss, Danny O'Day, could boast, with one of his robust laughs, that he was "the monster maker."

In pop music, the tradition of the tribute band, the imitator, the impersonator, is now as durable as the concert T-shirt or the demand for an encore. As far back as the Seventies, touring and club acts meticulously did their best to look and sound like the Doors or the very much alive Bruce Springsteen, and tourists in Manhattan flocked to *Beatlemania*, a Fab Four tribute that ran on Broadway for two years. To this day, you can easily see tributes to ABBA, Rush, or Eighties and Nineties hip-hop. The new-tech twist is the hologram, which has brought Michael Jackson, 2Pac, Frank Zappa, and Whitney Houston back to a semblance of life.

Impersonating a dead pop star, or reviving them virtually, is one thing. But more than 40 years ago, Danny O'Day took imitation to a place no one imagined before or since. Rock and Roll Heaven, the touring extravaganza he conceived and promoted, didn't just pay homage to one deceased icon, but four of them: Elvis, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, and Jim Croce. And it didn't do it merely with costumes or note-for-note vocal imitations: O'Day hired plastic surgeons to physically alter his tribute singers to look as much as possible like the people they were honoring. "Jesus Christ – that's some twisted shit," says Croce's son A.J., who was only a grade schooler when O'Day hired an upstart to be resculpted as Croce's father. "The first thing that comes to my mind is that plastic surgery is the highest form of flattery."

"He was way ahead of the curve," says Jeff Pezzuti, founder of Eyellusion, responsible for recent hologram tours of Frank Zappa and Dio. "It was very fresh at that point compared to now. Way before technology, there wasn't anything else you could do."

What O'Day himself dubbed his "clone army" only wound up fighting a few minor skirmishes: a handful of TV appearances, and gigs at clubs, state fairs, and casinos, earning enough notoriety to have possibly inspired not one but two *Saturday Night Live* parodies. (The first was a 1981 skit about a sleazy Rock and Roll Heaven marketing company, featuring Eddie Murphy, that made a joke about "the Three J's – Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Jim Croce.") In 1978, the clone tour was cited in ROLLING STONE's year-end issue, under the header THE BRIDES OF FUNKENSTEIN. ("Two aspiring women performers underwent plastic surgery: one to look like a female Elvis; the other, Janis Joplin.") But almost as soon as it arrived, Rock and Roll Heaven imploded, and O'Day became the smallest of footnotes in pop history books. A.J. Croce hadn't heard of the tribute until contacted by ROLLING STONE, and neither the Joplin estate nor the surviving members of the Doors remember these "clones" from more than 40 years ago.

But long before Las Vegas residencies, biopics, and massive publishing buyout deals, O'Day imagined a world in which classic-rock nostalgia would be a lucrative business. He knew the time was coming when the bond between rock icons and fans would grow so intense that an industry could rise to exploit that union. "Once the artists are gone, they're gone," says Pezzuti. "And you have the fans who want to see that artist continue."

O'Day would never be on the level of Colonel Tom Parker, but he was something else entirely – rock's own P.T. Barnum, a man who could, in Wise's words, "sell ice cream in hell." If that meant hiring someone to turn living singers into facsimiles of deceased ones, so be it. "In this country, we always want what we can't have," O'Day once said. "Look how well records by dead rock stars sell. You don't miss your water until the well runs dry. It's America."

O'Day would never be on Colonel Tom Parker's level, but he was something else entirely: rock's own P.T. Barnum.

TO HEAR HIS FAMILY TELL IT, DANNY DIXON O'DAY could have been a star. Growing up in Baltimore, he played drums in a few local bands, and thanks to an unstable household – his mother had several husbands, according to a family member – the teenage O'Day left home for California, where he hustled his way into other bands. He wound up in one called the Flim Flam Band, where his future wife Effie saw him perform covers in her hometown of Ocala, Florida, in the early Seventies. With his sandy-brown hair, six-foot-plus height, and strong voice, O'Day had the goods: "He had talent, and he could play almost any instrument there was," Effie recalls. The two married in 1974, and O'Day eventually adopted her two children from a previous marriage.

The Flim Flam Band continued working, in what O'Day's cousin Paul Patten calls the "Howard Johnson's tour" of lounges in those family-vacation hotels. By 1977, the band found itself gigging in Arkansas, doing what their guitarist Jim Wise calls "Stevie Wonder and disco stuff." O'Day was also learning how to work the system. Wise heard a story – maybe apocryphal – that O'Day had booked pop star B.J. Thomas into a local club, took the money, and then disappeared; it turned out he didn't actually rep Thomas at all. "Sounds right," says Patten, laughing. "We called him the flim-flam man with the Flim Flam Band."

By coincidence, Wise had a brother, Dennis, who knew how to sing like Elvis. Jim called Dennis, who was then selling Toyotas at a Honolulu dealership, and asked if he'd want to come to Arkansas and try out for their band. It was late 1977, Elvis had just died, and maybe there was a market for a tribute act. Dennis Wise sang "Trying to Get to You" for O'Day and the band, and O'Day told him that was all he needed to hear.

Dennis Wise thought that was the end of it all and he would return to Hawaii, but instead, O'Day asked him to meet at his hotel. There are disputes about what happened next. Wise says that, inspired by *Dark Passage,* the 1947 film in which Humphrey Bogart's escaped-con character undergoes plastic surgery to avoid recapture, he suggested altering his face to look more like the King. "Danny was flabbergasted I said that," says Wise. "You know that saying about a lightbulb going off over your head? It was not for money purposes. I wanted to be an entertainer, and who doesn't want to be like Elvis – come on!"

Effie insists the idea was her late husband's. "How would Danny come up with that?" she says. "I have no idea. It was such an odd thing. I was like, 'What?' But his mind worked that way. He would sit around talking about things like that. . . . He could visualize things happening or ways to promote them. He would say, 'We ought to do this!' and I would be, 'Oh, my gosh!' "

O'Day already knew the limitations of tribute bands. He had previously wanted to manage a Barbra Streisand impersonator but soon realized the audience wouldn't buy his first choice: At five feet two and 160 pounds, she didn't conjure Streisand physically. He had to think outside the rock box, and maybe drastic measures were in order.

O'Day started by taking Wise to a Florida dentist, who shaved his teeth down to resemble Presley's and closed up the gap in his two front

LONG LIVE THE (NEW) KING Original faux-Elvis Dennis Wise practices with O'Day (above), and shows off his reconstructed face to talk-show host Mike Douglas (right).

teeth. Finding the right plastic surgeon to tweak Wise's lips and cheeks and straighten his nose was tougher. O'Day's first choice bailed when his name leaked to the press. O'Day scrambled and found a replacement after several tries. Eventually, O'Day was able to smuggle Wise into that clinic on that day in January 1978.

O'Day had what felt like a foolproof method of making the operation seem as routine as possible. "When I take these people in, they already have a basic resemblance to the person I want them to look like," he said. "I just say, 'I want plastic surgery done on her nose and his chin and this and that and, oh, by the way, I just happen to have a picture here of exactly what we want done.'" When the six-hour procedure was finished, Wise was rolled out in a wheelchair, his face covered in bandages. "There must have been 100 people from the press all over the world taking pictures," he says. "It was amazing. They're yelling at me, 'How do you feel?' 'What are you thinking?'"

Wise says he didn't tell anyone in his family, including his parents or brother, since he feared they would think he was nuts. But several weeks later, he made his post-surgery television debut on *Good Morning America*, and at press conferences began imitating Presley's Southern drawl and polite use of "ma'am" and "sir." His brother Jim watched one of his TV appearances in a bar. Jim wasn't sure what to make of it, but he did see one upside. "Dennis got his nose broken when he was in the Marines," he says. "Somebody hit him in the face and knocked him out. So the surgery was an improvement."

Wise made his debut onstage so soon after the surgery that black rings still encircled his eyes. The novelty of the show, at a club in Melbourne, Florida, combined with all the press the surgery had received, commanded a rock-star-worthy fee – $15,000 a week (about $60,000 today). The first night, Wise was singing "Love Me Tender" and passing out scarves à la the King when a woman in the crowd came up and grabbed him in the crotch. "She wouldn't let go," he chuckles. "The guys in the band were all laughing."

But for Wise, the jailhouse only rocked for so long. He says he and the band weren't paid in full for their work. ("Blame it on the club owner," O'Day said in response.) When Wise reexamined his contract at the time, he realized he'd signed with O'Day for 50 years and that O'Day was entitled to half his earnings. Wise trekked to O'Day's home in Ocala, just in time to see his boss roll up, living large. "Danny pulls in with a brand-new Burt Reynolds Trans Am," he says. "Guess where the money went?" Wise wound up suing O'Day for negligence (claiming his "professional reputation has been damaged") and "breach of fiduciary duty," demanding a minimum settlement of $2,500. Wise says he never saw a dime, nor ever saw O'Day again. But for O'Day, it probably didn't matter: He already had a bigger, grander, and wilder scheme in mind.

RAMONA CAYWOOD – then Mona Caywood-Moore – was playing bar gigs in Ohio, in a band called Stage Fright, when she received a call from a friend in the business. "He said this guy is putting together a show and they need a Janis Joplin," Caywood recalls. Since Joplin imitators were rare back then, Caywood adds, "I was the only person who could do that at the time."

Caywood, a native Californian who sang in a sassy rasp reminiscent of Joplin's, didn't know the full story. But once she arrived for the job, she realized what her new boss had in mind. O'Day's experience with Wise may have ended badly, but it gave O'Day a taste of big-time showbiz, and he wanted more. What if, instead of one altered rocker, he had an all-star ensemble of them? "He did say, 'Well, what can we do? Something nobody's ever done before,'" recalls Effie. "Some people thought it was very bizarre, but people were interested in it from the standpoint of business."

To make himself feel better about the idea, O'Day ran it by his mother: What if his younger brother, who'd passed away at 21, had been an entertainer and died and had been resurrected by way of plastic surgery? His mom said she'd be fine with it as long as it was done "in good taste," and that was good enough for her son.

By 1978, Elvis wasn't the only rock star in the grave; the body count was rising. Joplin had overdosed eight years before, and Caywood knew the repertoire well. Morrison had been found dead in a Paris bathtub seven years before. As it turned out, Duke O'Connell, the drummer in an O'Day-managed cover band called the Copycats, had been singing Doors songs in that group. Cram him into brown leather pants and he might pass for the Lizard King. Croce had perished in a plane crash in 1973, but Marc Hazebrouck, a former truck driver and psychology major from Rhode Island, was already playing songs by Croce and had a droopy mustache to match. Since Wise was persona non Presley in O'Day's world, a new King was needed. O'Day heard about a local Florida band whose lead singer, Jesse Gamble (then Jesse Bolt), was a good Presley mimic, and even already owned a blue jumpsuit.

When O'Day proposed the idea of surgical transformation to them, the newly hired hands were either eager or puzzled, depending on the singer. "I just thought, 'Well, I don't know – what does that mean?'" says Gamble. "I was 30 or 32 and wild and crazy anyway. And I said, 'Well, you know, I guess I could do something.'"

PREVIOUS SPREAD: JEFF ROBBINS/AP IMAGES. THIS PAGE, LEFT: CBS BROADCASTING

Caywood was up for singing Joplin tunes: "I thought, 'Cool, that sounds fun!' I'm famous for picking up and moving my entire life. Sight unseen, always." And just like O'Day, each was hungry for recognition and success, a very different type of American dream.

Once again, O'Day arranged for the operations, forked over the money (supposedly in the area of $500,000, partly from loans), and alerted the press. This time, the surgeries weren't quite as invasive as they'd been with Wise. Hazebrouck's lips were enlarged and lowered, and his straight hair was given a Croce-style perm. Bags were removed from under O'Connell's eyes, and wrinkles from his cheeks. Caywood had a small implant in her chin "that just made it look a little more pointy – so minor, like outpatient stuff."

Gamble had the most minimal work done: The surgeon basically made a cut above his lip to make it look as if he'd had surgery. "The idea was to say I was trying to develop the sneer, I guess," he says. At Gamble's suggestion, his girlfriend, a North Carolina native named Deborah (or Erin) Rhyne, had her nose straightened and hair dyed black to resemble a "female Elvis." ("I'm going to be Elvis in the early 1950s, when he was feminine-looking," she said.)

O'Day then arranged for the performers, still bandaged up and looking like mummies with large eyeholes, to be publicly unveiled on a network daytime show, *America Alive!* In fact, the clones didn't need the bandages, but O'Day, ever the showman, insisted they keep the wraps on for maximum suspense. The results could be comical: Caywood recalls a drive when some of them were pulled over by cops, who thought the bandaged people in the van were thieves.

The TV appearance was a mixed bag: Dr. Joyce Brothers, the star psychologist and talk-show regular, accused O'Day of being a Manson-style cult leader. But none of it gave O'Day even the slightest pause; by now, he was in full Barnum mode. At a hotel pool in Florida, an on-message O'Day introduced his clones to a writer from the *Miami News* and regaled the reporter with tales from his rock & roll crypt. In his mind, Rock and Roll Heaven would merely be the beginning. He talked about re-creating Buddy Holly, Jimi Hendrix, and the members of Lynyrd Skynyrd who'd died in a plane crash the year before. Then, he would move on to dead comedians, remaking people to resemble W.C. Fields and Abbott and Costello.

O'Day – who used the word "clone" while agreeing that that wasn't quite the right scientific term for what he had paid doctors to do – even boasted he'd found a chemist in Los Angeles who could alter someone's pigment. "I've got this kid who does a great Otis Redding, but he's white," he said straight-faced. "If it turns out [the chemist] can deliver the goods, then we'll give the kid the pigment." Hearing those comments again, Gamble sighs: "That sounds like sitting down and talking to him. It was like the stream of consciousness off the top of his head. He would just come out with that stuff, you know?"

Newspaper headline writers reveled in the weirdness of Rock and Roll Heaven, dubbing it "the cloneheads" and referring to O'Day as the "clone ranger." O'Day brushed off any and all skepticism. "I don't see a morbid aspect," he said. "I would see a morbid aspect if we were being crassly commercial in cashing in on dead people. But all we're doing is emulating the dead people with all due respect."

Watching from afar as he attempted to revive his deflated career as a new Elvis, Dennis Wise had his worries. "What Danny is doing with his new idea is just not right," he told the *Miami News*. "I would tell those people not to do it. They don't know what they're getting into." But nothing would stop them, or O'Day.

"[Danny] wanted all the glory," says Ramona Caywood, who performed as Janis Joplin. "The shit hit the fan."

ROCK AND ROLL Heaven opened with the backup band playing an instrumental version of the Righteous Brothers' dead-rocker hit of the same name. What followed was anything but conventional, even during an era, the Seventies, when genuine rock stars would pop up on campy network TV specials. The band shifted into "Also Sprach Zarathustra" (the theme from *2001: A Space Odyssey*), the traditional orchestral opener for Presley's shows, and Gamble, in full Elvis sunglasses and jumpsuit, welcomed everyone to the performance. "I forget the script," Gamble says, "but it was Elvis coming down from heaven to bring back some friends."

Often, the shows would start with O'Connell as Morrison, vamping through the Doors' "Light My Fire," "Love Me Two Times," and "Touch Me," before Hazebrouck came out with Croce hits like "Time in a Bottle" and "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown." After a brief intermission, the band launched into a stomping groove, and Caywood stuck her hand through a curtain holding a bottle of Southern Comfort before emerging – "feathers flying," she says – and starting her Joplin set, which included "Ball and Chain" and "Piece of My Heart." Then, Gamble would reenter, karate-chopping his way through a medley of Elvis hits, before everyone reconvened onstage for a grand finale. Dry-ice fog made a cameo, too.

Despite the media splash and countless articles that accompanied it, Rock and Roll Heaven didn't exactly rock the house when it launched. At the tour's debut, at the Southeastern Music Fair in Atlanta in September 1978, fewer than 50 people showed up. (O'Day bragged to a reporter that it was a "small but mighty" crowd.) "He didn't like that, the state fairs," says Effie. "But a lot of the nightclubs were afraid it was just a freak show. They didn't know they were talented musicians." In Miami, the tour was booked into the Persian Room at the Marco Polo Hotel, but when not enough tickets were apparently sold, it was downgraded to the Swingers Lounge Disco. "They were bombs, man," says Caywood of the earliest, sparsely attended Rock and Roll Heaven shows. "We did a couple of state fairs where there were, like, four people in the audience."

At an early stop on the tour, one reviewer noted that few of the performers resembled their dead counterparts that much. "If you can't read the first three lines on an eye chart, then I suppose physically he might fool you," he wrote of Croce, also pointing out that the clearest resemblance came by way of the band's non-altered lead guitarist, a dead ringer for Peter Frampton. Caywood denies a report that she had her jaw restructured, which was likely more O'Day hype: When another reviewer pointed out that Caywood wasn't a dead ringer, so to speak, for Joplin, O'Day claimed she would have further work done to counter the criticism.

Some of the performers had reservations about what they were doing. "Yeah, I thought, 'Oh, this is so weird,' many times," Caywood says. "I'm impersonating her, but I was the same age she was when she died." But some of that melted away when O'Day landed them a residency at Harrah's in Lake Tahoe, followed by a similar stint at that same casino in Reno in the early months of 1979. It wasn't Vegas, but it was close, and it came with perks, like all the alcohol and Perrier anyone wanted. In Reno, Gamble saw O'Day handing out five-dollar bills to people at the door to lure them inside.

Caywood was already "a fireball, get-out-of-my-fucking-way person," as she says, with a badass stare and freewheeling vibe to match. She'd previously worked in a health-food store, but for Rock and Roll Heaven, she developed a fleeting taste for Southern Comfort, Joplin's drink of choice. "It was a Method-acting thing," says Caywood. "When I found out I was going to do this, I said, 'Well, enough of [health food],' and I went out and had a cheeseburger with a shot of whiskey and beer." To dispel any doubts about the actual alcohol in her onstage bottle, she'd pour some of it into the glasses of skeptical fans in the front rows, and watch as they gulped it down and realized they were drinking genuine Southern Comfort.

Gamble, a high-school dropout who'd worked as a carpenter and in local theater productions of musicals like *Bye Bye Birdie,* reveled in his Kingness. He recalls seeing cocaine backstage, and during a Tahoe drive, Gamble stocked his black Lincoln with a cooler of beer and some Jack Daniel's – and was, of course, pulled over by cops for some infraction. Luckily, Gamble says, he was able to point to a Rock and Roll Heaven billboard with his face on it, and he got away with just a warning.

Ultimately, just as in the living-person rock business, money changed everything. According to Caywood and Gamble, no one was getting paid much, if anything at all, and what pay existed wasn't always equal. "I feel weird saying this, but basically I was the hit of the show," says Caywood. "And I wasn't being paid anywhere near what 'Jim Morrison' was. It was just not right."

SURGICAL STRIKES Left: Caywood, Rhyne, Hazebrouck, Gamble, and O'Connell (from left), 1978; Above: Rhyne and O'Day, post-surgery, performing as Linda Ronstadt and Kenny Rogers in Orlando, 1981.

The *Reno Gazette-Journal* agreed, noting, "Caywood-Moore's 'Ball and Chain' is a showstopper."

As the Reno run began winding down, O'Day planned to take Rock and Roll Heaven to its natural destination: Las Vegas. But he hit a snag: According to his musicians, the Vegas casino establishment wanted ownership of the idea and were less interested in working with O'Day himself. "He needed those people if we were going to play in Las Vegas," says Caywood. "He wanted all the glory. The shit hit the fan." When the run ended in March 1979, Caywood recalls "a big blowup" over money, and the band broke up. O'Day fled to Florida – supposedly, Gamble heard, with $120,000 of their earnings. ("I wasn't there, but he wouldn't do that," counters Effie. "I'm sure he didn't have the money. I don't know where it went or if somebody didn't get paid.")

Infuriated, Gamble says he followed O'Day back home to Florida to demand his money. He heard O'Day was now working with a country band – something about tributes to country singers – and tracked them down in a bar. O'Day wasn't there, so Gamble had to content himself with walking off with a piece of stage gear.

IN THE AFTERMATH of the collapse of Rock and Roll Heaven, Danny O'Day went in search of an encore. Returning to Ocala, he found his marriage falling apart and began working construction jobs. He and Effie were divorced in 1979. "We just sort of grew apart," she says with a sigh. "He was having to be with the band, and the kids were in school. I wasn't able to travel."

But O'Day had one more tour to launch, and in a way, it was his eeriest one yet: He would become one of his own clones.

Ironically, the makeover would be inspired in part by Erin Rhyne, the female Elvis in Rock and Roll Heaven and the member of the troupe who'd been the most damaged by it. The atmosphere and show itself proved to be too much for Rhyne. As she later told the *Orlando Sentinel,* the whole show gave her "the creeps" due to "real weird girls who started hanging out during my shows, biker types." She complained to O'Day about her female-Elvis role, but he wasn't listening: "Nothing I said seemed to sink in," Rhyne said. "I really hated him then." On New Year's Eve 1979, during the tour's Reno run, she tossed down 50 sleeping pills and some champagne and hoped it would all end.

Rhyne survived, and overcome by guilt, O'Day brought her to Florida to help with her recovery. The two wound up singing covers in another band, poetically named Xerox, and before long, they became romantically involved. After the semi-highs of their casino days, they found themselves scrambling to survive, selling magazines to convenience stores and even hawking their own blood to pay the bills, as they told the *Orlando Sentinel*. The two still performed in what tiny clubs they could, but one day a waitress told O'Day, who was singing Kenny Rogers songs with another act, that he bore some resemblance to the "Gambler" growler. And with that, another lightbulb flicked on.

In February 1980, friends, family, and roller-disco ushers gathered at the Fifth National Banque, a club in Norfolk, Virginia, for what O'Day's business manager would call "the first clonehead marriage." Their faces covered in bandages, O'Day and Rhyne took their vows; even the bride and groom figurines on the cake were swathed in bandages. (When the ceremony was over, they had some difficulty eating the wedding cake.) The next night, they and a new batch of "clones" appeared onstage, and suddenly O'Day was Kenny Rogers and Rhyne was looking a bit like Linda Ronstadt, then at the peak of her pop career.

To become the "Gambler" balladeer, O'Day had a hair transplant, dyed his hair gray, and had his jowls tightened. O'Day later admitted the idea was also suggested by Rhyne and that he had his own doubts: "I said, 'What, are you crazy? Me go in and have my face carved?' But I was pretty ugly anyway." And the hype factor, always important to O'Day, appealed to him, too: "Man, the monster-maker himself onstage. Of course they'll come."

Rhyne sang credible Ronstadt covers, while her new husband dug into his performing past to mimic Rogers' husky delivery. The gimmick baffled some who had known O'Day. "Danny – as Kenny Rogers?" Wise says. "Kenny had a really unique voice. When I heard that, it struck me as funny. We all went, 'What the hell?'" But for Patten, who attended the service, it was O'Day's new normal: "Again, it was Danny doing what Danny did."

A month later, O'Day popped up at a Rogers press conference in Virginia, where he and a seemingly amused Rogers good-naturedly tugged at each other's beards. O'Day rounded up another Jim Croce and another Elvis and found a local Florida musician to go under the knife to more closely resemble Buddy Holly. The group slogged on, hitting up clubs and nightclubs, until the next logical step in the traditional rock-band arc arrived – a reunion tour. Hazebrouck, who was still performing as Croce, rejoined O'Day and Rhyne for a Kenny, Linda, and Jim show. O'Day was finally the headlining star attraction he'd always longed to be, if not the way he'd quite planned it. (Actually, they didn't go on the road so fast: The first gig, at a club in St. Petersburg, Florida, perhaps aptly named J.P. Bottom's Lounge, never happened. Just as he arrived, O'Day was hauled off to jail for being behind on his child-support payments.)

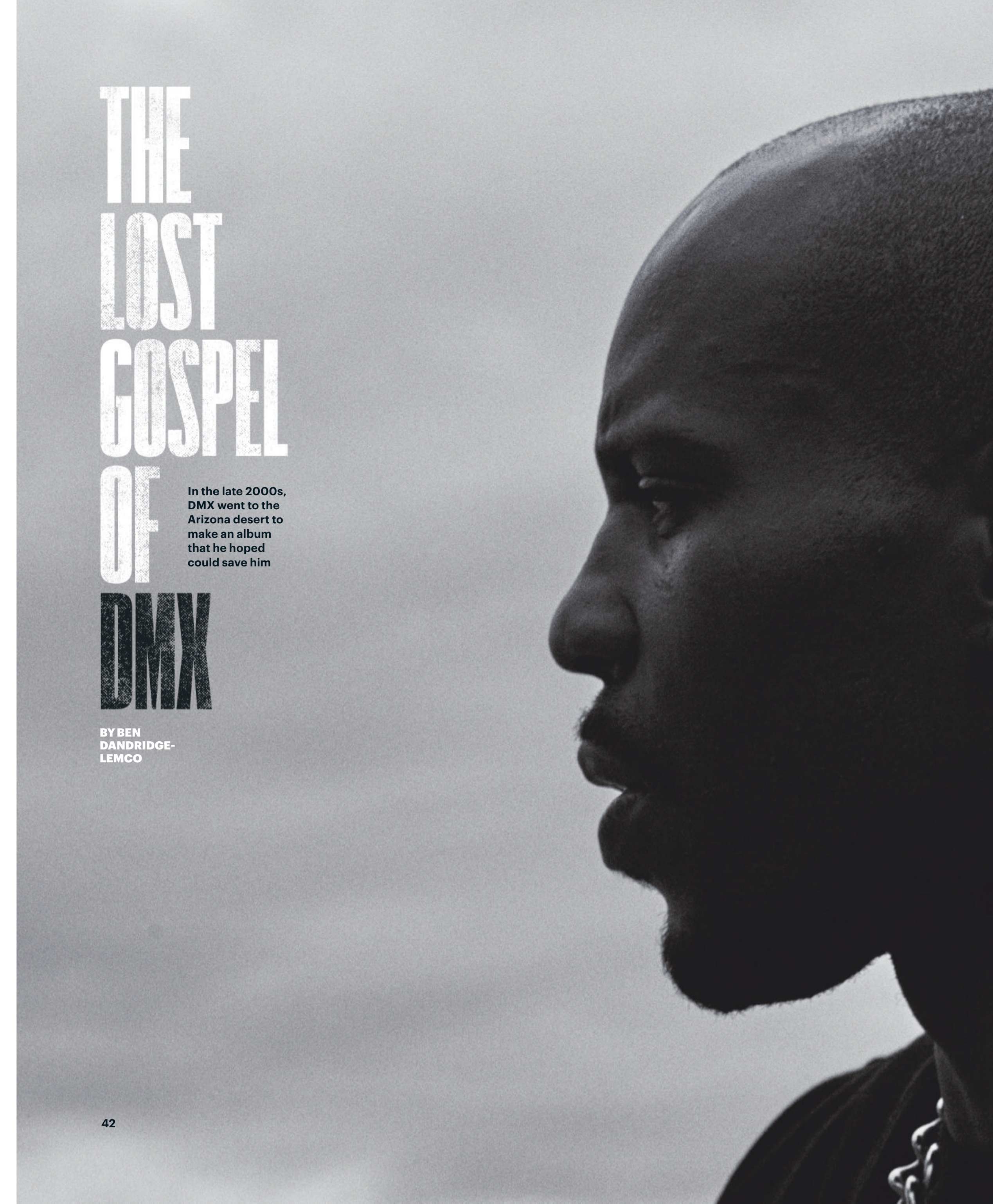
Billed occasionally as "The World's Greatest Clones," O'Day, Rhyne, and sometimes Hazebrouck slogged on for a few more years, playing clubs in their new home base of Virginia and nearby Pennsylvania. A husband hired them to perform at his wife's 40th birthday party, since she was a Rogers fan. ("I knew it wasn't the original," the woman said of O'Day. "I asked him to show me his license and he refused.") According to Rhyne's sister-in-law, Wanda, Rhyne was happy, for a time: "Danny was the love of her life. Debbie loved all that. That was her life." [*Cont. on 81*]

FROM LEFT: BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; "ORLANDO SENTINEL-STAR"/TCA

THE LOST GOSPEL OF DMX

In the late 2000s, DMX went to the Arizona desert to make an album that he hoped could save him

BY BEN DANDRIDGE-LEMCO



LORD GIVE ME A SIGN
DMX in 2008

went to Arizona to record his fourth album. By then, he had already become an unlikely superstar, a barking battle rapper turned crossover sensation. He had channeled all the pain of his first three decades on Earth, all the rhymes that had been filling up the pages of his notebooks for years, into three multiplatinum albums. His single "Party Up (Up in Here)" was breaking down the door to a new demographic of fans. Just a few years before, Puff Daddy had said DMX was unmarketable. He used to be feared in his own neighborhood in Yonkers, New York – someone people would avoid when they saw him coming around the corner with his dog. Now the whole world wanted a piece of X.

After three years of nonstop movement, DMX found space to reflect in the desert. Along with his go-to producers, his road managers, and his close friends – all the people who made sure his early albums came together – he rented a few houses in a quiet neighborhood in Scottsdale. Even after late nights, he would wake up early and sit by the pool, reading the Bible. They would pack buckets of chicken, fill a cooler with beer, strap rifles to their four-wheelers, and ride out into the desert for hours until there was nothing around them but soil and sky. This was before Phoenix's outer suburbs had been developed; his exit was the last one on a stretch of highway that was still being built. It wasn't uncommon to pull up to a stoplight and see a pack of coyotes heading off toward the mountains. The environment was the opposite of where DMX had come from, far from the tall project buildings that kept one side of the street shaded.

Early one morning, on the way back from recording all night at Phoenix's Chaton Studios, DMX pulled over on the highway. It was around 6 a.m. and the sun was starting to rise, the horizon in front of him transforming from deep purple to bright orange. Four cars lined up, hazard lights blinking, and DMX's crew stood on the side of the road, watching a new day begin over the Sonoran Desert. "It was at that point that I fell in love with Arizona," DMX would later say in an interview with a local news affiliate. "I said, 'You know what? This has to be God's country.' "

During that 2009 interview, the reporter asks him questions from across a table in the visitation room of a Maricopa County jail. DMX wears a black-and-white striped uniform with a pink undershirt, an infamous visual trademark from Joe Arpaio's reign as the local sheriff. His hair and beard are grown out, the corners of his hairline receding into two deep V's. He speaks candidly and clearly, only pausing and getting choked up when he talks about missing his kids. He seems to laugh at his own naive view of the desert back then, or maybe at how much his life had changed over those past eight years.

"Then I met the devil in God's country."

EARL SIMMONS OFTEN talked about his life as a battle between opposing forces. Light and dark, blessings and curses, God and the devil – these themes are a constant presence across his music. "Feel the pain, feel the joy/Of a man who was never a boy," he rhymed at the end of "Look Thru My Eyes" from his multiplatinum 1998 debut album, *It's Dark and Hell Is Hot,* offering a succinct guide to the journey he would lead his fans on for the rest of his career.

DMX grew up in what were considered the roughest projects in a city that a federal judge would later rule had "illegally and intentionally" discriminated against Black residents in its public schools and housing. His 2002 autobiography is a vivid account of trauma, full of allegations of neglect and abuse and descriptions of the overwhelming despair of the group homes and juvenile facilities where X spent much of his first 18 years. Religion was a beacon of stability in his life, from the Jehovah's Witness services he attended with his mother to his grandmother's Baptist faith; many years later, he would say that he'd come to forgive his mother. But when individuals and systems failed, DMX turned to the streets, committing robberies to feed himself and his addiction. The weight of his circumstances was supposed to crush him like countless others whose names the world never learned.

"I said, 'This has to be God's country.' Then I met the devil in God's country."

Instead, for a few brief years at the turn of the millennium, he reached a pinnacle of American celebrity. As a chart-topping rapper, DMX, who died at age 50 in April 2021, embodied the extremes and lingered in their contradictions. On his albums, he cast himself as a preaching sinner, always reaching for the redemption that was just beyond his grasp. His power as an artist lay in the balance he struck between aggression and vulnerability; he could rob you in one verse and pray for you in the next. The menacing stories and snarling anthems wouldn't have been as effective if not for the conversations with God that always followed.

The drug addiction that plagued DMX for most of his life was inseparable from the music that had delivered him. In a 2020 interview, he returned to a story he first told years before, in his autobiography: When he was 14, he alleged, his mentor and first collaborator tricked him into smoking a blunt laced with crack. (DMX's mentor disputed some details of this account after the rapper's death.) "This guy introduced me to what would be the best part of my life, which would be the rap," DMX said through tears, still grappling with the betrayal. "But the thing with my life, it's blessed with a curse."

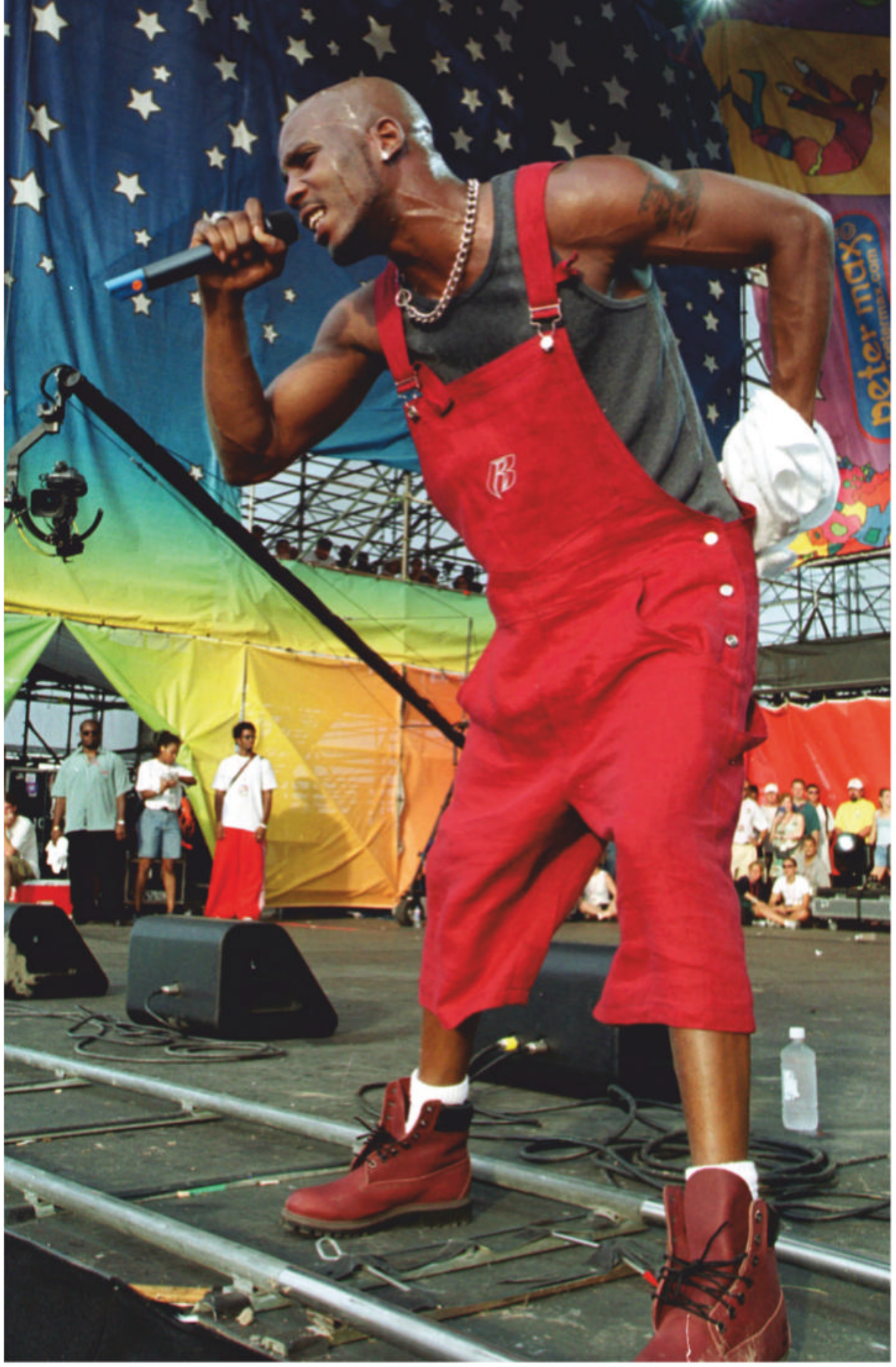
As DMX fell further away from his peak years, his trauma threatened to overshadow his talent. While living in Arizona in the late 2000s – with his career at an impasse, his marriage falling apart, and his arrests dominating headlines – he set out to record a double album that would put the disparate parts of himself back on equal footing. He named the project *Walk With Me Now and You'll Fly With Me Later;* the first side would be hip-hop and the second side would be a gospel album, featuring the profanity-free, spiritual rap songs that he had always reserved one slot for on albums past. "No songs about bitches, no songs about robbing, just straight 'Give God the glory,' " he said at the time.

Though DMX completed the double album, it was never released as he intended. Some songs were put out against his stated wishes, and others have languished on hard drives for more than a decade. The project, and its gospel side in particular, became a forgotten part of his discography. Arizona, a place that had once been his refuge from the burden of being DMX, became another site of his self-destruction.

DMX ALWAYS SAID a prayer before he performed. Onstage, he ended his sets with the prayers that appeared on his albums. After his shows – depleted and emotional – he would pray again.

Watching footage from a 1998 performance at the Apollo Theater is a visceral snapshot of the raw power and agonizing weight that he brought with him into the industry. The crowd that night in Harlem jumped, swayed, and shouted along to the rowdy singles "Ruff Ryders Anthem" and "Get at Me Dog." He was dripping with sweat by the time he closed the show with the prayer from his first album, written years before in solitary

This is BEN DANDRIDGE-LEMCO*'s first story for the magazine.*



GET AT ME DOG
DMX's incendiary performance at Woodstock '99 came at a time when he was arguably rap's biggest star.

confinement at a Westchester County prison. He began to cry and shake, his coarse voice rising and cracking, as he recited the prayer's closing line: "So, if it takes for me to suffer for my brother to see the light/Give me pain till I die, but, please, Lord, treat him right."

From the beginning, DMX saw himself as a vessel. Ray Copeland, an uncle on his mother's side and his manager early on, remembers sitting with X and the rapper's then-wife, Tashera Simmons, in the kitchen of the couple's first house, in New Jersey, soon after X had signed with Def Jam. "I'm not just yours," he told them. "You have to share me with the world."

But as his career exploded, the pressure became overwhelming. His childhood had been largely devoid of love, yet suddenly, he was adored by crowds of people he'd never met. "He didn't expect to get that much fame, even though he knew he was a great artist," says Joaquin "Waah" Dean of Ruff Ryders, the label that helped launch DMX to stardom in the Nineties. "He didn't know how to receive the love."

On the road, DMX went out of his way to shirk the aura of celebrity. In every city, he sought out the most infamous neighborhoods. He spent hours hanging out in Chicago's Cabrini-Green, gambling in the back of a barbershop in New Orleans' 3rd Ward, and eating Jamaican food in Brixton. He preferred home cooking to dining out, and was always meeting someone whose mom or grandmother was happy to cook for DMX. "We'd take them to the grocery store, get all the ingredients, and then go to strangers' houses and take over their living room, front porch . . . and they'd cook breakfast for us," says Ali Samii, his former road manager. "This happened hundreds of times."

Though the passion in DMX's performances never wavered, multiple former members of his road team say that their experience on tour was often defined by the rapper's rebellious side. He frequently delayed going onstage to perform until the very last moment. At times, it seemed like X was testing those close to him, seeing if they would quit on him like so many people in his life had before. "That was hard for me," Samii says. "He's your friend, and you keep making him do shit he doesn't wanna do in an industry where he's telling you these people are vultures and bloodsuckers."

Even as he sold millions of records, DMX saw himself as being at odds with the music industry. In 2003, he announced that his fifth album, *Grand Champ,* would be his last. "I'm going into the church," he said, the first such proclamation in what would become an oft-repeated aspiration. In another interview soon after, he was more explicit about the reason he wanted to distance himself from the music business. "It's robbery, and I can't be a part of it anymore," he said. "You do so much for the record label, you make so much money for them, and then, at the end of the day, you're nothing but a number."

Jenn Turner, DMX's assistant around this time, remembers seeing the rapper crying during the tour for *Grand Champ* and asking him what was wrong. "They stole my love," he told her. "He had the Number One album, he had a bunch of money," Turner says. "He had all of the things that you would think would fulfill him, and he was miserable."

In 2005, DMX returned to music, citing a conversation with Mase – who had left behind his own rap career to become a minister years before – as his inspiration. ("He was like, 'As long as you have that talent, you don't have the right to say whether or not you want to use it,' " DMX said, recounting their talk.) He turned his ire toward Jay-Z, who had recently been appointed as president of Def Jam. The two had battled in the early Nineties, before either one was famous, and later that decade they'd made hits and toured together. As artists, they had always represented different vantage points: Jay-Z, the suave hustler, and DMX, the rugged underdog speaking for the downtrodden. Over the years, their paths had diverged even further.

Darrin "Dee" Dean, Waah's brother and Ruff Ryders co-founder, says that Jay-Z cleared millions of dollars in debt that DMX owed to Def Jam and let him walk away with his music. "I told Jay to release him because he's not happy here," Dee recalls. X went to Columbia for 2006's *Year of the Dog . . . Again,* which became the first album of the rapper's career not to debut atop the charts.

Tashera had been with DMX for more than a decade before his rise to fame, but by this time, his addiction and infidelity had begun to tear their marriage apart. She saw his drug use as a defensive reflex when the world's demands became too much: "To block everyone out, normal people go on vacation, sit on the beach, stare at the ocean. I believe Earl resorted to what he had done in the past. He said it's the only time that nobody wanted to mess with him, and he loved that."

Arizona, with its wide-open expanses and lax gun laws, offered a different kind of escape from

PREVIOUS SPREAD: MATTHEW SALACUSE/REDUX. THIS PAGE: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

his traumatic past and strenuous present. After DMX's first trip there in 2001, Tashera began looking for a house in the Phoenix area. They bought an adobe-style home in the northeastern suburb of Cave Creek in 2003. It sat on a few remote acres with horse stables and a pool that looked out toward the mountains.

Just a few years later, the dream was falling apart. "I felt like he was out of control," Tashera says. "I thought we needed to take a break and separate, which Earl was not happy with."

After their separation, DMX made the Arizona house his permanent residence. But as he spent more time in the desert, he started getting more unwanted attention. Police cars followed him home, pulling him over even when he wasn't driving.

On Aug. 24, 2007, about a year after their separation, officers from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office raided DMX's home in Cave Creek, acting on a tip that dogs were being kept in inhumane conditions. They seized 12 malnourished pit bulls and dug up the remains of three other dogs on the property.

Dogs had been DMX's companions since childhood. They showed him how to love unconditionally, and they featured prominently in everything from his barking vocals to his album covers. But he had also pleaded guilty to animal cruelty in 2002, stemming from an earlier incident at his New Jersey home when he was charged with neglecting 13 dogs.

At the time of the Arizona raid, DMX was on tour and hadn't been in the state for months, his lawyers said. "Earl had a caretaker, who obviously wasn't taking care," attorney Murray Richman said at the time. "Earl loves those dogs."

Arpaio, in his fourth term as Maricopa County sheriff, was already gaining a national reputation for publicity stunts like the pink underwear in his jails and the time he hosted an "Inmate Idol" singing competition. He was also becoming a magnet for accusations of real cruelty: Critics charged that prisoners were killed and tortured during his 24-year regime, often while still awaiting trial. The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office would later be hit with racial-profiling lawsuits from the ACLU and the Department of Justice related to its indiscriminate sweeps and raids on local Latinx communities, and Donald Trump would ultimately pardon Arpaio in 2017 after the sheriff refused to comply with a judge's order to stop targeting people believed to be undocumented immigrants. In DMX, it seemed, Arpaio found a perfect target: a troubled Black celebrity whose struggles with mental health and addiction were tearing his life apart at the seams.

(In a lengthy statement to ROLLING STONE, Arpaio calls DMX "a career criminal," contests some allegations, and downplays others. "Out of all the officers working on the streets and in the jail system, I recall only a few of my officers being investigated over allegations of torturing and killing inmates awaiting trial," he writes. "Payments paid out because of lawsuits totaled about $85 million in almost 24 years. How many large police departments, who don't even run jails, have less than $85 million paid out because of lawsuits?" His statement goes on to decry the ACLU and federal government's lawsuits over his immigration law enforcement as "strictly politically motivated.")

WHEN PAT GALLO first got to Arizona in the mid-2000s, he remembers meeting DMX outside a barbershop in Phoenix and being taken aback by the rapper's appearance. "He wasn't in the best state," Gallo says. "He's got the bald head with the sides of it all grown out, and his beard is all scruffy."

Gallo, an aspiring producer who'd grown up in Westchester County, was part of a crew of associates who worked on DMX's Arizona house. In between tiling the bathroom and hanging TVs, Gallo gave DMX a CD of his beats, one of which showed up on the rapper's next LP.

In 2007, Gallo got a call from DMX out of the blue. The rapper had signed a new deal with Bodog Music, the newly formed label division of the online gambling company, and they had given him a budget for his album. "I was just a young kid, excited," Gallo says. "I booked my own flight to get out there."

Gallo, who's white and close to a decade DMX's junior, says all the two had in common at first was music. At one point, early in Gallo's yearlong stay in Arizona, DMX asked him for relationship advice. " 'You gotta do what you need to do to make yourself happy,' " Gallo recalls telling him. "I think he realized the genuineness, and his eyes lit up. The guard went down."

At the time, DMX was hesitant to trust anyone dealing with his business. When an entertainment lawyer who hoped to represent him flew in, the rapper put him through a trial by fire. "I need you to trust me and I need to trust you," Gallo remembers X telling the lawyer. They were all standing in the kitchen of the rapper's house, and DMX picked up a handgun. Pulling back the hammer, taking out the clip, and emptying the bullets, he handed over the gun and told the lawyer to point it at his own head: "You trust me, right?" The lawyer looked down at the gun for a moment and then, screaming, pointed it to his temple and pulled the trigger.

To avoid paying alimony and taxes, DMX didn't have a bank account at this time, according to sources with knowledge of his career. Instead of wiring DMX the money from his advance, an A&R rep at Bodog would fly down from Canada every few weeks with $10,000 in cash, the maximum amount allowed across the border without being declared. DMX had also lost his license after multiple driving-related arrests by this point, though that didn't stop him from getting behind the wheel.

Saltmine Studio, where DMX recorded, was a little over an hour away from his home in Cave Creek. Gallo remembers the desert outside becoming a blur as the speedometer in DMX's yellow 1966 Chevy Nova crossed 130 miles per hour. "It's like he tried to beat his time every time he left his house," Gallo says. "The thing shook as soon as you hit 60, but he just pushed it."

Despite the upheaval in his life, DMX was determined to execute his vision for *Walk With Me Now and You'll Fly With Me Later*. On the wall of one room at Saltmine, he wrote out the double album's title in black marker. Industrial-metal pioneer Al Jourgensen was mixing a Ministry album in the studio next door, and studio owner Don Salter remembers the two musicians striking up a conversation about art and life in the hallway. DMX's sessions would usually begin after midnight and end when the sun rose. "Then, very often, he would take us all to Denny's," Salter says.

The first song that Gallo, who produces under the name Divine Bars, made with DMX in Arizona was "Already," a chest-thumping track that sounds like it could have appeared on a *Madden NFL* soundtrack. In the verses, DMX rails against the fakeness of popular rap when compared with his own authenticity. "There was an anger about him at that time," Gallo says.

When DMX was moved to record his gospel songs, the sessions took on a different kind of emotional intensity. A singer named Janyce met DMX in 2005, when the rapper came into the Phoenix Nordstrom's where she worked. Janyce and her sister had won a talent competition and signed a record deal a few years earlier, but it never went anywhere. When DMX came into the store, her co-workers encouraged her to sing for him. She sang, he took down her number, and later, she and Gallo spent long hours in the studio, working on hooks and bridges for X's gospel album.

After laying down her part for a song called "Let Me Be Your Angel," Janyce got out of the booth at Saltmine and found DMX waiting for her. She remembers him being so inspired by the song that he went in and recorded two verses on the spot. "I ask a lot of questions, 'cause I need a lot of answers/Sometimes I think I need to ask the questions faster," he raps, an earnest account of the trials and tribulations that always led him back to God. "When he got out of the booth, he was in tears," Janyce says. "He was crying out to the Lord."

"When he got out of the booth, he was in tears. He was crying out to the Lord."

DMX and Gallo recorded the bulk of the songs intended for the gospel album in a single night in 2008. They were up against a deadline to finish the project, and Gallo remembers that it was difficult to get DMX to the studio that evening. He arrived in the early hours of morning and went up a spiral staircase to a loft, then went into an upstairs bathroom to smoke crack. When he came out, he told Gallo to put on a beat, rapidly wrote a song, recorded it top-to-bottom in one take, and then climbed the stairs back up to the loft to repeat the whole process. By the time the sun came up, DMX had written and recorded seven gospel songs.

Over time, Gallo began asking DMX questions about his addiction. At one point during their time living together, DMX asked Gallo to film

ARIZONA JUSTICE

Arpaio, the notorious former Maricopa County sheriff, ordering some of the people he put behind bars to a separate area of Tent City, in 2009

ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP IMAGES

him after he used to see how he looked when he was high. "I wasn't comfortable doing that," Gallo says. "I think he saw how I looked at him in that state. It wasn't him anymore. It was this scared person."

At times, DMX would disappear for days. Once, when Gallo found him, DMX was having trouble breathing. Gallo says he took him to the hospital, even though DMX begged him not to. "Sometimes I felt like I enabled him," he says. "He knew I would always be there."

Gallo says he and DMX lived under constant police surveillance. Knowing DMX didn't have a license, he says, officers would wait for the rapper to pull out of his property, then pounce. "We couldn't leave the house without getting pulled over," says Gallo, who lost his own license after he was stopped while driving one of DMX's unregistered cars to the store.

On the night of May 8, 2008, around eight months after the initial raid, DMX, a cousin from Yonkers, and San, a longtime member of his road team, were hosting a few friends at the rapper's house. When it started getting late, their friends left, but a few minutes later, they called back to the house: On the way out, they had seen a truck parked nearby with two men sitting inside.

DMX's home in Cave Creek was surrounded by desert on all sides. There were only a few other properties in the area. DMX, his cousin, and San grabbed guns and rode out on four-wheelers. "We don't know if somebody's trying to set us up or what's going on," San says. "We felt like we had to protect ourselves." When they pulled up to the truck, the two men were standing outside. DMX asked them what they were doing, and one of the men said they were looking for a place to get high. "X had the gun in his hand, started flipping out, and was like, 'Get the fuck out of here,' " San says.

The men drove off, but now DMX was spooked. They all stayed up into the early hours of the morning with their guns close by. Around 3 a.m., DMX went into his bedroom, and San nodded off on the couch. San woke up a few minutes later to a loud banging against the reinforced metal gate at the front of DMX's property. He opened the front door and heard screaming: "Police Department! Drop the gun!"

Turning back toward the living room, he saw a black-clad SWAT team holding M16s. San dropped to the floor, tossing his own gun on the couch, when, he says, they started shooting rubber bullets through the glass. He felt an impact in his stomach but, looking down at his shirt, he didn't see any blood. He crawled through the kitchen. Then he heard another loud bang.

"I start hearing X screaming, like not normal screaming, at the top of his lungs," says San. "All you hear is glass breaking, walls breaking, and he's screaming."

The sheriff's department had driven a tank through the side of the house, San says. Later, DMX would tell San and Gallo that he had been sitting on the toilet when the front of the tank came crashing through his bathroom wall. ("Several search warrants were issued on [DMX's] property," Arpaio writes. "SWAT teams were used on occasion due to the possible danger to my officers." He adds: "We don't have a tank for enforcement activities.")

When they got back the next day, after DMX was released from jail on bond, "it was like a tornado went through the house," says San. All the windows and doors had been smashed, and there were marks on the floor from where the SWAT team had thrown flash-bang grenades. DMX's belongings were piled in the middle of the living room, broken and disheveled.

Reports at the time, quoting a statement from the sheriff's department, said that DMX had "attempted to barricade himself in his bedroom when police arrived to detain him." A few days after the raid, DMX put his own response on record, calling out Arpaio by name on a song called "Soldier," which surfaced online in July 2008. The song is built around a familiar Isaac Hayes sample, previously used by Biz Markie and Mary J. Blige, interspersed with sound bites from news reports. "Move, bitch, get out the way/Boom, boom, boom, can little Joe come out to play?" DMX raps, before launching into a torrent of homophobic slurs. He also references the militarized raid on his home: "Niggas roll with an army, so you bring tanks/I'm from New York, put me in jail, I bring shanks."

The raid, it became clear, was related to charges of animal cruelty and drug possession stemming from the previous raid in 2007. Over the next few months, DMX was arrested on a number of nonviolent charges, including identity theft (for providing a fake name at a hospital). When he failed to appear in court in December 2008, Arpaio reportedly offered a $5,000 reward for his arrest. A few days later, X was arrested by FBI agents in Miami at the home of producer Scott Storch. He ended up pleading guilty to animal cruelty and drug possession, which allowed the other charges to be dropped.

In the grand scheme of Arpaio's reign as sheriff in Arizona, DMX is a blip – there were many people, much more vulnerable, who bore the brunt of Arpaio's policies. But in DMX's life, this episode proved to be devastating. Over the next several years in Arizona, he was arrested again and again, mostly for violating his probation and traffic incidents.

In the jailhouse interview on local news in 2009, the reporter asks DMX if he thought he'd been targeted by Arpaio. "I don't know," the rapper said. "I do pray for that man, as I pray for everyone else. . . . Because we're all God's children, and we all deserve the same grace."

ONE SUNDAY MORNING in 2009, Pastor Barbara King was delivering a sermon at Morning Star Baptist Church in Phoenix. She was preaching about Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem when she looked up and saw a man she didn't recognize crying in the pews. "He came up to the altar, and he wanted prayer," she says. "He was telling me that his life was tore up. He had lost everything. He wanted to accept God back into his life, and he wanted to repent for his sins and his wrongdoing."

DMX had only been out of jail for a few days when he arrived at Morning Star. After they prayed together that day, King says DMX came back every Sunday, sometimes bringing half the club with him from the night before. In the afternoon, after services, he would head to her house and cook his specialties: spaghetti and crab legs. "He was like part of the family," she says. "He would cook, and he would put on roller skates so it would be like Sonic. He would be roller-skating and serving everybody."

In 2010, DMX and King planned a fundraiser concert for the church, to be held at a local high school. When that plan got shut down, King says, the church removed all its pews and DMX did his show there, treating the tiny house of worship

THE LOST GOSPEL OF DMX

like a major arena. He performed gospel songs from his past albums, as well as some songs from the still-unreleased gospel album. "He prayed so hard to the pastors that didn't even think he was worthy to be in the church," King says. "He had them crying."

By the time he got out of jail in 2009, DMX's plans to release *Walk With Me Now and You'll Fly With Me Later* had been derailed. Bodog Music had shuttered after increased government scrutiny of their parent company's online gambling operations, and a small Canadian label called Her Royal Majesty's Records had ended up with the rights to DMX's album.

"Record companies and executives were afraid of Earl," says Nakia Walker, who managed DMX from 2009 until 2011. "We entertained a lot of opportunities, and people were afraid: 'He's gonna go to jail, he'll be on drugs.' If someone had given him the opportunity then, he would have had something to look forward to."

Walker and DMX lived in the same condominium complex in Scottsdale after the rapper's release from jail in 2009. She says DMX spent a lot of that time hiking, riding his four-wheelers, watching movies, and playing with his remote-control cars and helicopters. "I've seen him exercise and be clean and eat well," she says. But sobriety was a daily battle. "You know how sometimes we can have all the answers for other people but not for ourselves?" Walker says. "He dealt with that a lot."

After his release on the animal-cruelty and drug charges in 2009, DMX pleaded guilty to assaulting a prison guard during the time he had spent at Tent City, Arpaio's outdoor jail in the Phoenix desert – the place the sheriff himself once referred to as a "concentration camp." A few months later, in Los Angeles, DMX turned himself in for a reckless-driving charge from years earlier. A few days after his release on that charge, he was arrested for driving without a valid license. His longest stay behind bars came in 2010, after he tested positive for cocaine multiple times during his probation. He served almost a year at an Arizona state prison, part of which was spent in a mental-health unit.

Pastor King says she stayed close to DMX during his time in and out of jail. He had told her that he wanted to become a deacon. She waited to give him the title – "I said, 'Earl, you can't be on TV telling people you're a deacon and then cuss people out when they make you mad'" – but after seeing his dedication to the church, she ordained him in 2012. "If we take a sin test in the church, nobody would be there," says King.

Talent manager Jason Fowler flew to Phoenix around this time at Tashera Simmons' request to try to help the rapper get his life in order. "I told him I would love to help, but I put some guidelines in place for me to work with him," Fowler says. "One of those was for him to move out of Arizona." To everyone's surprise, DMX agreed. In 2011, he relocated to South Carolina, leaving behind the place that had given him so much freedom and persecution.

Most of the songs that DMX recorded for the gospel album leaked online in the early 2010s. They've existed as low-quality uploads on YouTube for the past decade, mostly flying under the radar for everyone except the most die-hard fans. On "It'll Be Alright," one of the strongest songs from the album, he sings about his obedience to God with a lilting, gravelly cadence that's familiar from his early career. Over forlorn guitar and piano, he raps forcefully: "Some of us do wrong with no remorse/ Some of us do wrong, see the light, and change course."

The rights to the album ended up getting sold to Seven Arts Entertainment, a company mostly known for producing films, which released an uneven DMX album called *Undisputed* in 2012. Three years later, in 2015, Seven Arts released a project called *Redemption of the Beast*, cobbling together many unfinished songs, mostly from the rapper's time in Arizona. At the time, multiple people close to DMX said that the album was an unauthorized release; through a representative, DMX said it was "all stolen music." That same year, multiple Seven Arts executives were convicted of tax fraud. At this point, Canadian businessman Howard Mann says, he won the company's catalog of DMX's music at auction.

Mann tells ROLLING STONE that he intended at first to use the songs for "EDM remix contests" for aspiring producers. After receiving a hard drive in the purchase, he noticed about nine songs filed separately from the others. "When I started to go through all the paperwork, I noticed that Seven Arts owned all of X's music, except for this one area that they identified as gospel tracks," he says.

He reached out to DMX in 2015 to discuss purchasing the rights to the gospel songs, but says he didn't hear anything until months later, when he got a call from a representative for the rapper saying that DMX would be in Los Angeles in a few days, and asking if Mann was willing to do the deal in cash. According to Mann, DMX showed up in person to collect the money and sign over the rights to his gospel album.

During the final years of DMX's life, Mann says he was unable to get in touch with the rapper: "There was never a time where it seemed like we could get to work on the project." Since DMX's death last year, Mann has been reaching out to engineers and producers who worked with him, talking with labels and distributors, and trying to plan for the gospel album's release.

Mann has a checkered past with intellectual property; in 2012, he was sued by the Michael Jackson estate in a copyright-infringement suit resulting from a collection of Jackson memorabilia he bought after the singer's death, and he ultimately was ordered to pay $2.5 million in a settlement. Mann says he's committed to working with DMX's estate: "Our goal is to make sure the benefactors are fully compensated."

DMX's estate has been complicated by the fact that the rapper didn't leave behind a will when he died. The rapper may have as many as 14 children, and another woman has recently come forward claiming to be his daughter. Still, the formation of the estate has been moving ahead: In October, DMX and Tashera Simmons' three oldest sons – Xavier, Sean, and Tacoma – were named temporary co-administrators of the late rapper's estate. [*Cont. on 78*]

SLIPPIN'
DMX in Arizona in 2008

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JONATHAN MANNION**

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HOW A NEW AGE ORDER OF FEMINIST NUNS IS REIMAGINING SPIRITUAL DEVOTION AND TRYING TO HEAL THE WORLD — ONE JOINT AT A TIME

By CORRINE CIANI

OUR LADIES *of* THE PERPETUAL HIGH

Photographs by YANA YATSUK

A Healing Trip

Sister Quinn smokes a joint: "I think that spirituality is interesting because it's natural, but kind of man-made. We all have our own beliefs, and we all create these constructs of beliefs that become religion."

In the middle of California's Central Valley, in a modest milky-blue home on one acre of farmland, lives a small group of nuns. They wear habits and abide by a set of vows, but as

the door opens, it's clear that the Sisters of the Valley, as they're known, aren't living in a traditional convent. Because as the scent wafts out, it's unambiguous: It's the earthy, pungent smell of weed.

When we visit, five women live in the home: Sister Kate, 62; Sister Sophia, 49; Sister Quinn, 25; and at the moment, Sister Luna and Sister Camilla, both 34, who are visiting from Mexico. Sister Kass, 29, lives off the property with her two children and her partner, Brother Rudy, the collective's crop manager. On this sunny day, the Sisters of the Valley home is flooded with golden beams of light; a cream-colored piano stands against the wall with an ashtray and joint placed on top. Sister Kate picks it up, lights it, and thoughtfully inhales as she sits down to play "America the Beautiful." She's using a piano-learning app filled with Christian songs and national anthems – the two genres of music she dislikes the most. But there is an underlying motive: "The Christian kids nearby have contests, so if I do a lot of practicing in a month, then I can beat them," she says with a raspy laugh. "There is some gratification in beating the Christian kids."

The Sisters of the Valley are not a religious organization, but an enclave of self-proclaimed sisters who are in the business of spreading spirituality and selling healing cannabidiol products. "Look, the average age of a new Catholic nun in America is 78," says Sister Kate, founder of the sect, which has 22 sisters and eight brothers worldwide. "Christianity is dying all around us. What are people going to do? They need spirituality in their life; we need it for meaning. We are very spiritual beings walking a physical path, and so for that reason we will find ways to connect. And we are just one example of that."

Their property is a peaceful setting, with ashtrays everywhere. There's a craft yurt, vegetable beds of kale and spinach, a trailer where Sister Quinn resides, and tall potted cannabis plants, which were cultivated in a shed and planted outside in preparation for the upcoming full-moon harvest. (All of these are hemp, from which they extract CBD, but they also grow marijuana for personal use.) A secondary home on the property, known as the abbey, is used for medicine-making. The scent of their lavender salve consumes this space. The walls are lined with photos of nuns and female religious figures, some with joints, some without. Sister Sophia smiles as she stirs a pot on the stove, heating up their CBD topical salve before packaging it into jars. When it comes to their products, it is always referred to as medicine, not cannabis, and all steps from planting, to trimming, to packaging are scheduled around the moon cycle.

Born into a traditional Catholic upbringing, Sister Kate spent a considerable amount of her youth surrounded by nuns. Prior to founding Sisters of the Valley, she was a consultant, traveling to assist clients who were opening telecommunications and internet businesses. But as a single mother, she gave up her career, which had required her to be away from home. With an undergrad in business, a half-completed MBA, and extensive experience working with deregulating businesses, she looked toward the cannabis industry as a new frontier. She moved to the Central Valley and started a nonprofit cannabis

This is the first piece for ROLLING STONE *from Los Angeles-based writer* CORRINE CIANI.

Taking It In
Sisters Luna, Sophia, Kate, Quinn, and Kass (from left) near their farm. "At this point, I feel like we're all family," says Sister Kass, a mother of two. "We basically do everything together."

STOP
CALIFORNIA
SOTV

collective in 2009, where she provided medical marijuana to local terminal patients.

According to Sister Kate, her fall into nunhood began in 2011, when the Obama administration lost a fight to have the Department of Agriculture declassify pizza sauce as a serving of vegetables in school lunches. "I said, 'Oh, my God, if pizza is a vegetable, then I am a nun,' " she explains. Soon after, when she was planning to go to an Occupy protest, her nephew reminded her of a nun costume she had in her closet, and suggested she wear it. "When I protested with the Occupy movement dressed as a nun, people wanted me to organize myself into a religion and I kept saying, 'No, this is meant to be crazy. This is meant to be a thumb at the establishment, that everything is broken in this country.' "

During her years of protests against tuition hikes and budget cuts throughout California as a self-proclaimed nun, the question arose: What would a new order of nuns look like? "I thought everybody would think I was crazy because I was this single, self-declared sister, but really it sparked a debate about what a New Age order of nuns would look like if they were refounded today in this environment," says Sister Kate. In August 2013, she was invited to a gathering of Native American tribes at the Tule River Reservation in the San Joaquin Valley. There, she talked to the women elders who held ancient knowledge of making medicine from plants. "When I came off of that mountain, I'm like, 'Damn, I'm going to form my own sisterhood,' " she says.

Fifteen months later, she made a Weed Nuns Facebook page; she soon amassed 5,000 followers. In 2015, one of those adherents landed on her doorstep, declaring she would work for free. "I thought, 'Huh, if four of us lived together and made medicine together, we could share our Netflix bill and I wouldn't have to give up cable,' " Sister Kate says, so she went about starting a commune. "We didn't want to be a religion. A religion forces you to be in the business of begging, and we know we can support ourselves. It had to be something that supported women ownership of businesses, and here we are. As it turns out, we end up looking like an ancient order called the Beguines."

Smoking Etiquette

Sisters Sophia, Camilla, Luna, Quinn, and Kate (from left) partake in their harvest, which is grown in California's Central Valley. "One thing I love about Covid is nobody passes joints anymore," says Sister Kate. "We roll, and we smoke our own joints — it's a very personal thing." She sees cannabis as medicine: "If I could grow a bed of poppies, I'd figure out how to make that medicine."

"When I protested with Occupy dressed as a nun, people wanted me to organize myself into a religion. I said, 'No, this is meant to be crazy — a thumb at the establishment.'"

A now-defunct religious order, the Beguines date back to the Middle Ages. Due to a multitude of unmarried women and a desire for spirituality, all-female groups found a way to live in devotion without officially joining a religious order. These women, who lived communally and supported themselves by making cloth or caring for the sick, stressed living like Christ; they were spiritual, and some even delved into mysticism. "We are not trying to romanticize the past, but there are things we like about it," says Sister Kate. "It's the way that these women worked in harmony with nature that we are trying to emulate."

Part of the Sisters of the Valley business plan involves devoting their work and life to the cycles of the moon, which they believe is what their ancient ancestors did. Their harvest ceremony, which takes place during a full moon, begins with a reading from the "Book of the Beguines," a pamphlet written by the enclave. "There's no such thing as a 'Book of the Beguines,'" Sister Kate confesses. "They were all burned. We make our own readings. We have to imagine what our ancestors would have said, what they would've done, and how they would have reacted to local political forces. Our closing prayer is from Season Four of *Game of Thrones*," she says, laughing.

By afternoon, the Central Valley sun fills the craft yurt. Sister Kate takes a seat under the skylight to explain the meaning of their vows, represented by the acronym SOLACE: Service, Obedience, Living Simply, Activism, Chastity, and Ecology. Service relates to their work making plant-based medicine – cannabis, and more recently, mushrooms. "Obedience is not to any

Indoor-Outoor Operation

Top left: Sisters Quinn, Kate, Sophia, Luna, and Camilla (from left) near the property. Bottom left: The sisters trim hemp plants, which are processed into CBD products and sold to support the commune. This page: Sister Luna looks in on one of their grows. “We grow an eighth of an acre of weed during the long season,” says Sister Kate, but the order is looking to expand.

Cyles of the Moon

Left: The sisters prepare for a moon ceremony. “We start our medicines on the new moon, and we finish our batch on a full moon,” explains Sister Kate. “As soon as we close out on a full-moon batch, we plan for the next. In between, we're labeling, bottling, testing, and getting ready for shipping.” Above: Sister Camilla, a co-founder of the Sisters of the Valley Mexico chapter. The sect has 22 sisters and eight brothers worldwide.

order or person but to organize our lives by the cycles of the moon,” Sister Kate says. Living simply, as she puts it with a smirk, “means *we* can’t own a yacht – but *you* can, and can invite us all to join you.” The fourth is activism, meaning holding local officials accountable.

Chastity, Sister Kate says, is not to be confused with celibacy. “Some people think that means you can’t do anything intimate, we can’t ever have a relationship, but that’s not true,” says Sister Quinn. “Our interpretation is that we are privatizing that part of our lives.” Ecology is for their intention to decrease their environmental footprint. And then, of course, there’s the full nun’s habit; it’s required on the farm, Sister Kate says, and is worn as a meditation to be in touch with their ancient mothers, to protect their hair and skin from medicine-making, and as a sign of respect for the plant that has been disrespected for hundreds of years.

With tens of thousands of followers on TikTok and Instagram, their message is spreading. Sister Quinn, their social-content creator, is aiming to make them more accessible. As an eco-feminist who studied business economics at University of California, Merced, she believes in microeconomies and sustainable communities. “I know that some things need to be on a bigger level, but I think that people living in small communities and sharing the work – the gardening and living together – I think that that’s a really positive direction that we should be going in society,” says Sister Quinn. In regard to the enclaves’ focus on feminism, she says, “it’s more about realizing that women and female entities are more connected with the Earth. We are the healers, portals for life; we create everything. We like to have a certain amount of harmony, a certain amount of balance. Everyone does their part.”

As for how local officials feel about the enclave, it’s taken the Sisters of the Valley years to get in the good graces of the sheriff’s department. The sisters are regulars at city hall and have emphasized building a relationship with local authorities – with good reason, since they have yet to receive a business permit to grow hemp for profit. “They haven’t given me a permit, and I don’t think they ever are going to give me a permit,” says Sister Kate. “We are in our seventh year of operations and to shut us down, I think, they would have to take us before a judge, and I don’t think a judge would shut us down when we have 10 people working on a one-acre farm.”

Jobs in the Central Valley are far and few, so Sister Kate is set on expanding their business and creating work and leadership opportunities for women. As a small business having been left rocked by Covid-19, the sect is saving what they can and searching for a farm to be able to manufacture hemp on a larger scale, furthering Sister Kate’s goal of hiring more of her local community and advancing her spiritually charged, cannabis-laced mission. “The idea is that the sisters set up their own business, set up their own commerce, have their own store,” she says. “[They] start out by earning either through wholesale or as an agent, but always plan to be making their own medicine and having their own little territory. . . . Everything about us is about female empowerment: women owning property, and women making the rules.”

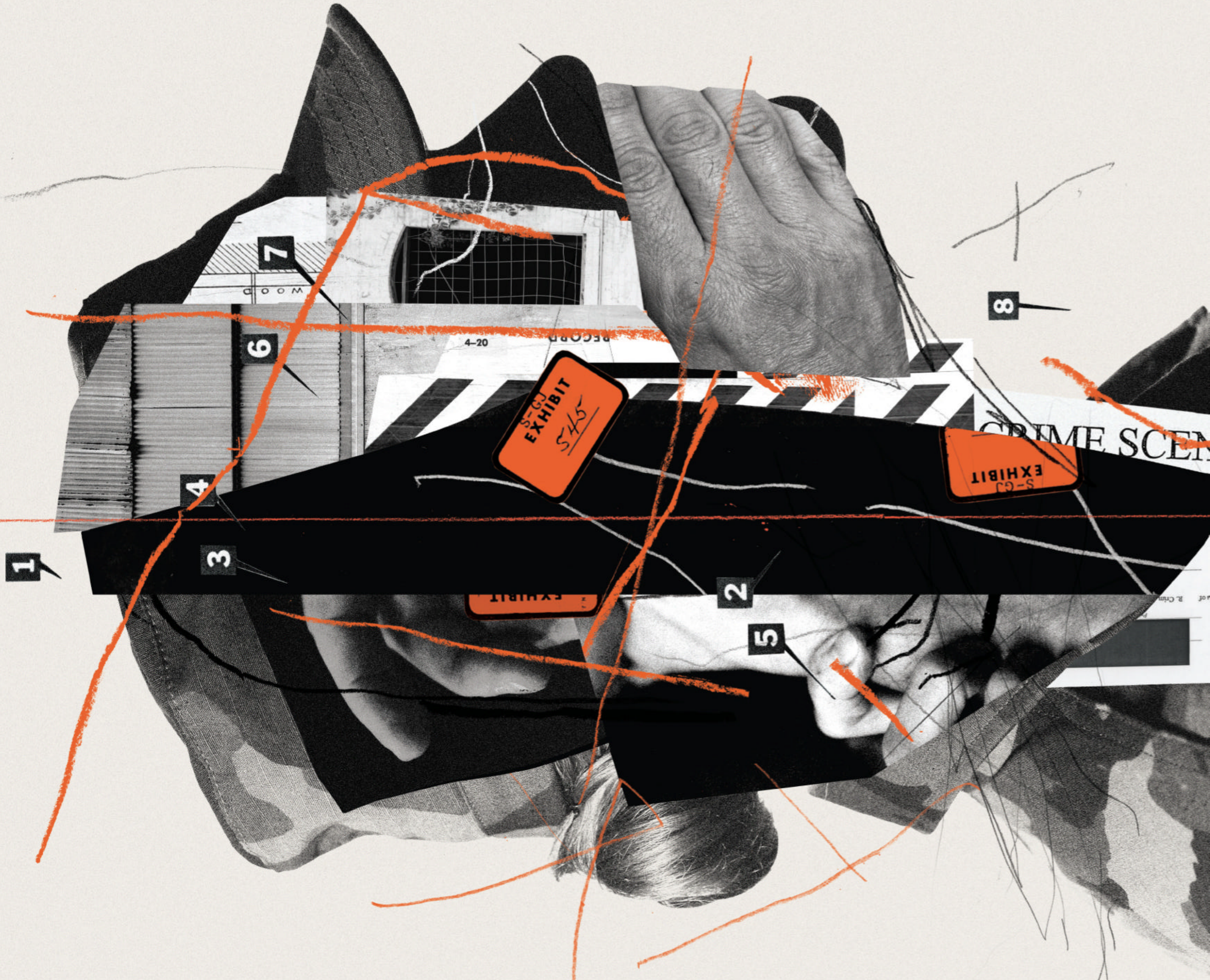
Delta Force's Dirty Secret

By Seth Harp

She accused a Special Forces operative of rape. He was quietly court-martialed and acquitted. Then the Army erased all record of the trial testimony. Now she demands answers

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE MCQUADE

FOR ERIN SCANLON, a junior Army officer in the artillery branch, Fort Bragg was a prime posting. The blond 25-year-old from suburban Phoenix had secured a lieutenant's slot in the storied 82nd Airborne Division thanks to the good offices of one of her ROTC instructors at the University of Arizona. "He was a really good mentor that I looked up to," she tells me recently. "He had been in Delta Force." • Scanlon lived off-post in an apartment in Fayetteville, a moody military town in the North Carolina pines just outside of Fort Bragg, the biggest Army base in the U.S. On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the evening of Sept. 9, 2016, a friend of hers from the gym, a military wife whom I'll call "Tina" to protect her privacy, invited her to a charitable event at a barbecue restaurant and bar called Mac's Speed Shop. It was a fundraiser to honor five slain Green Berets, hosted by "some SF guys," Tina texted.

The Special Forces of the U.S. Army are based out of Fort Bragg, as is the powerful and secretive Joint Special Operations Command, making this spot, inland of the Eastern Seaboard, the central node in the United States' global special-operations complex. But Scanlon's unit, despite its distinguished pedigree going back to World War I, is a division of the conventional Army, which is kept separate from top-secret JSOC by high walls, both literal and figurative.

Scanlon and Tina arrived at Mac's shortly before 10 p.m. A number of motorcycles were parked out front. They belonged to members of the Coast x Coast motorcycle club, made up of active-duty soldiers on Delta Force, a classified manhunting unit that is the Army component of JSOC. A nonprofit associated with the club, the Coast x Coast Foundation, raises money through annual cross-country motorcycle rides to honor fallen special operators. The founder and CEO of the nonprofit is a 39-year-old man, Cristobel Lopez Vallejo, who goes by the alias Cris Valley. He was host of the event at Mac's that night. Right as Scanlon and Tina walked into the crowded barbecue joint and beer hall, Vallejo stopped them, "tried to flex, laughed, and walked away," Tina would later recall to a Fayetteville detective.

Vallejo, dressed in camouflage cargo shorts and a T-shirt, was tall, lean, strong, and fiercely handsome, with a black beard and shaggy brown hair much longer than most soldiers get to wear. "Throughout the whole night he kind of acted like a celebrity," Scanlon says. "Going around chatting with people like a politician."

At the time he met Scanlon, who was nearly 10 years his junior, Vallejo was a sergeant first class. He had done three combat rotations with Delta Force – two in Afghanistan and one in Iraq – but she never guessed that he was a "trained killer," in her words. She took him for a run-of-the-mill special-forces veteran, retired from the Army or otherwise discharged, because she'd been taught that it's against regulations for active-duty personnel to solicit donations for a military cause, and that was the whole point of the Coast x Coast Foundation. "A guy who's in Delta Force would not be flashing his name around and having a nonprofit and partying at a bar. He was not a 'quiet professional,' " she says, using a term that special-operations generals came up with in the 1980s to describe themselves, and since repeated endlessly in the news media.

Shortly after she and Tina arrived at Mac's the night of the fundraiser, Scanlon recognized the Coast x Coast club's logo from a Facebook photo of her old ROTC mentor, the ex-Delta soldier, which made her implicitly trust Vallejo and his crew, she recalls. "I asked him if I could take a picture in front of their logo to send to my instructor," she says. "He gave me his card and invited us to go to the next bar with everyone."

They exchanged phone numbers, and a group of about nine, led by Vallejo, relocated from Mac's to a bar called Paddy's, an over-the-top Irish pub out on Raeford Road that has a metal detector at the front entrance, bartenders in Scottish kilts, brass bathroom door handles cast with anatomical exactitude in the form of male genitalia, and urinals shaped like a woman's mouth. At one point, while posing for a group photo, Vallejo "grabbed my ass," Scanlon claims. "I didn't say anything when he did that. Sad as it is, that happens a lot. That's being a girl at a bar."

According to text messages she sent a girlfriend the next day, Scanlon "was drunk and flirted with him." But she didn't consent to what later ensued, she immediately added. "I said no over and over."

Scanlon claims that Vallejo raped her that night, and says that the trauma still haunts her to this day. Reached through his lawyer, Vallejo declined to comment for this story. Vallejo says the sex was consensual and was acquitted of all charges arising from the incident in a June 2018 court-martial on Fort Bragg. He was originally set to be tried in civilian court, but Army prosecutors assigned to Special Forces swooped in at the last minute and caused the Cumberland County district attorney to drop the charges so that Vallejo could be tried by the military. No reporters attended the subsequent court-martial, and no transcript was made of the proceedings. As soon as it concluded with an acquittal, the Army deleted the audio recordings.

Scanlon maintains that her case was mishandled. She says that she was excluded from hearing the testimony of the other witnesses, that her military-appointed attorney was swapped out five separate times, and that one of them was called to provide testimony against her. Her experience with the military-justice system illustrates the myriad difficulties faced by women in the overwhelmingly male armed forces who report being raped, and raises questions about the adequacy of the uniformed chain of command to protect the interests of victims of sex crimes allegedly committed by service members.

Scanlon previously told her story to Ella Torres of ABC News, who published a thorough report on her case in 2020, and *The Fayetteville Observer* covered aspects of it in 2019. But neither ABC News nor the *Observer* named Vallejo, and ABC only mentioned in passing that the alleged rapist was a member of Delta Force. That's a significant omission, because Scanlon's case is also a signal example of another systemic issue in the military: the entitled attitudes and hard-partying lifestyles of some elite soldiers more than two decades into the war on terrorism; the apparent breakdown in good order and discipline in the Special Forces in recent years, with rising instances of alleged criminality among Green Berets and Navy SEALs; and the special treatment often accorded to special operators by civilian and military law enforcement in and around Fort Bragg. Scanlon agreed to go on the record again, in greater detail, "if you would be willing to reiterate that my perpetrator was Delta Force. And that was the reason why my case was handled the way it was."

Scanlon wants 'Rolling Stone' to reiterate that her alleged perpetrator "was Delta Force, and that was the reason why my case was handled the way it was."

WELL AFTER MIDNIGHT, with Paddy's about to close down, Vallejo invited Scanlon and Tina to "the after-afterparty" at a place he called "Warehouse 13." Thinking it was some kind of lounge or club, they took a cab to the location on Worth Street in downtown Fayetteville, only to find that it was literally a warehouse. "Sketchy-looking," Scanlon describes it, comparing it to a rundown CrossFit gym, "with a roll-up garage door, by a railroad track and a junkyard."

This industrially zoned property, which Vallejo rented from a chemical company, is cut off from any obvious street access, being surrounded on all three sides by train tracks, storage buildings, and scrap yards. The only entrance is hard to find and closed off by a chain-link gate.

Arriving at the site in the early morning hours of Sept. 10, 2016, Scanlon and Tina were immediately creeped out by the griminess of the location. "We're not staying more than 20 minutes," they agreed. They only stayed that long because Tina was famished and there was a Crock-Pot of food on a folding table.

There were three Delta Force soldiers, plus a retired bomb technician, in addition to Vallejo who went back to the warehouse that night, all of whom were Coast x Coast members. Women made up the rest of the party: two young Army officers, the widow of a slain Green Beret, and a Las Vegas woman who belonged to "a traveling company of women bartenders that dance and sing," according to her blog posts.

Scanlon derisively refers to the latter four as "groupies." A Fayetteville police detective used the same language in his report on her case.

Iraq War vet and contributing editor SETH HARP *wrote about the border crisis last summer.*

Career Cut Short
Capt. Erin Scanlon (left) accused Sgt. Cristobel Vallejo (below) of raping her after a night of partying that ended at a rundown warehouse and unofficial headquarters of the Coast x Coast motorcycle club (bottom). Vallejo, a member of the elite black-ops Delta Force unit, was found not guilty during a court-martial. Scanlon says the Army mishandled her case and that the ordeal damaged her military career. "The jury should have been brought to the location at night," she says. "I don't see how anyone could have believed that consensual sex occurred there."

"Mr. Vallejo is considered a ladies' man and 'groupies' hang out at the ware house [sic] looking for an opportunity to sleep with Mr. Vallejo." This, the detective noted, was according to an employee of the Fayetteville Police Department who had to recuse herself from the case because she herself had once spent the night at Vallejo's apartment.

No more than 10 minutes after arriving, Scanlon sent a text message to a 25-year-old staff sergeant, another soldier at Fort Bragg, whom she occasionally hooked up with. This was in violation of regulations that forbid "fraternization," or close personal relationships between officers and enlisted soldiers, but as the staff sergeant wasn't in her unit or her chain of command, she thought of it as little more than a peccadillo. The staff sergeant had invited her over to his house earlier in the evening, but she and Tina hadn't wanted to leave the party. Now, she told him that she would be over shortly, and used her phone to order an Uber to take her there. An Uber driver started toward the warehouse at 2:50 a.m., according to screen shots of the app that Scanlon gave police.

On the point of leaving, Scanlon says she asked Vallejo where she could find the restroom. But the warehouse had no plumbing; there was only a portable toilet out back. "You're lucky I'm the Army," she told him jokingly, setting her phone and purse on the folding table. "Because otherwise I would not be using a port-a-potty."

She went outside and crossed the blacktop to where the toilet was set up against the exterior wall of a metal building. It was a warm night in the Carolinas, with a quarter-moon in the sky. She passed a covered motorcycle trailer with a looming portrait of a slain Delta Force soldier printed on the side. The adjacent alley was full of junked cars. "The jury should have been brought to the location at night," she says. "I don't see how anyone could have believed that consensual sex occurred there."

When she finished using the toilet and opened the door, she was startled to find Vallejo standing right there. "He just ambushed me," she says, repeating what she told Fayetteville police, according to the written report of the detective assigned to the case, Paul Matrafailo. "That's what it felt like. He didn't let me get past him. He started kissing me, and I was pushing him away. I said, 'No, find someone else. I'm not doing this.'"

She remembers being pinned against the grille of a vehicle, Vallejo putting his hands up her dress, into her underwear, and penetrating her with his fingers. He was seven inches taller than her and 70 pounds heavier. "He literally picked me up off the ground, and my shoes fell off."

He set her on the flaking hood of a defunct Saab convertible that was sunk in tall weeds. He then allegedly forcibly "penetrated her vagina with his penis against her will," Detective Matrafailo wrote in his report. After that, she put up no more physical resistance. "Ms. Scanlon realized that this was not going to stop," Matrafailo wrote, "and gave up fighting back in the hopes that it would end quickly."

At one point the Green Beret's widow, a redhaired woman, came around the corner and saw what was going on. She yelled something unintelligible before disappearing. Scanlon says the detail initially slipped her memory. She says she didn't tell her lawyer about it till months later.

Vallejo didn't use any form of contraceptive. As soon as it was over, Scanlon says, "I jumped up and grabbed my shoes and ran inside to get my stuff. It was right around 3 a.m. My phone was being blown up by my friend [the staff sergeant] and the Uber driver, who was there trying to find me."

Tina had gone out front to smoke a cigarette. She looked up and saw Scanlon emerge from the warehouse and start toward the only outlet to the street, a narrow strip of dirt parallel to the train tracks. Tina watched Vallejo walk up behind Scanlon, causing Scanlon to "dart off," according to the statement Tina gave Matrafailo. "I followed her," the detective's notes of the conversation read. "She was shaking, acting odd, pacing. She told me, 'I feel like I just got raped.'"

Scanlon had to order another Uber, as the first one had given up and driven off. On the way to the staff sergeant's house, where she'd spend the night, she looked at her phone and saw that Vallejo had sent her a text: "How are you? Let me know when your [sic] home safe." To this he appended a heart emoji and a kissy-face.

"Do you realize what you did?" she replied at 4:25 a.m.

He didn't respond.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: IMAGES USED IN ILLUSTRATION BY THE IMAGE BANK/GETTY IMAGES, 2: PHOTOALTO AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: COURTESY OF ERIN SCANLON; FAYETTEVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT; PHYLLIS B. DOONEY

THE NEXT MORNING, Scanlon went directly to the Womack Army Medical Center and underwent a sexual-assault forensic examination. The nurse who did the rape kit noted in her report that Scanlon's eyes were red and her makeup was smeared. She described Scanlon's "general demeanor" as "tearful."

The examination revealed multiple small lacerations on her vulva, as well as a contusion and four scratch marks on her left flank and lower back, from the hood of the car. The nurse took swabs from Scanlon's vagina and cervix, and collected as evidence her soiled underwear. The samples proved a match to Vallejo's DNA.

Scanlon agonized over what to do next. "Maybe I wasn't clear enough," she texted a girlfriend at 8:59 a.m. on Sept. 12. "I was pushing him away saying no stop but I think by the time he got me back to the cars in the dark and he wouldn't stop so I just let him do it."

"Anything other than you saying yes or asking for it is not consent," her friend replied.

"I feel guilty," Scanlon texted. "Like maybe I'm making a bigger deal out of it than it was."

"It is not your fault," her friend responded, "and it is a big deal."

"Monday morning I went into work," Scanlon says. After speaking with a chaplain, she met with her unit's SARC, or sexual-assault response coordinator, who took her to meet with agents from the base's Criminal Investigation Division. She still didn't know that Vallejo was an active-duty soldier, much less that he was on Delta Force. "There are recordings somewhere," Scanlon says. "After I gave my statement, the CID agents left the room. The main one came back and said, 'Because it occurred in Fayetteville, we can't help you.' "

"That is not accurate," a spokesman for Army CID, Jeffrey Castro, writes in a statement. According to him, agents initiated a "collateral investigation" with Fayetteville police. But Castro can't say when that investigation began, why Scanlon felt that her initial complaint had been dismissed, or whether the recordings she mentioned still exist.

Scanlon went to the Fayetteville police the next day. After taking her statement and reviewing her text messages, Detective Matrafailo drove her the three blocks to the warehouse in an effort to identify the precise location. "Ms. Scanlon began to cry," he wrote in his report, "as she pointed out the building."

Matrafailo obtained a warrant, took DNA samples from the hood of the Saab, reviewed security footage, visited Mac's, and interviewed Tina, among other witnesses. On Sept. 30, he arrested Vallejo on a felony warrant for second-degree rape, second-degree sex offense, and sexual battery. In his mug shot, Vallejo appeared freshly shaved, his beard gone. Only then did Scanlon learn the real identity of the man she knew as Cris Valley. "The detective told me, 'This guy's active-duty,' " she recalls. " 'He's in JSOC.' "

Hard Fight "It was a solid case and my testimony was powerful," Scanlon says today, "but I was up against Delta Force and JSOC, and all that entails."

According to Vallejo's enlistment-record brief, obtained by ROLLING STONE, he was born in California and joined the Army shortly before 9/11, when he was 19. He transferred to Fort Bragg three years later to attend the JFK Special Warfare School, the completion of which entitles a soldier to wear a coveted green beret. He proceeded to rack up practically every qualification an infantryman can attain, undergoing advanced training in land navigation, reconnaissance, surveillance, sniping, and high-altitude parachuting. He was taught how to survive behind enemy lines, resist interrogation, and escape from POW camps. He learned to read and understand Arabic, but could not speak it.

His first deployment was to Mali, in 2007. Next came back-to-back tours in Iraq. As of 2010, the document shows, he was a "TEAM MEMBER/OPERATOR" in the organization demarcated "1ST SFOD-D (DELTA FORCE)."

Like SEAL Team 6, its sister unit and only military peer, Delta Force is what's known as a Special Mission Unit. There are at least two other SMUs, one dedicated to surveillance and the other to aviation, reportedly. Together they make up the core of JSOC, the "black ops" component of the military. Unlike Tier 2, or "white," special-operations forces, made up of ordinary Green Berets, Army Rangers, and Navy SEALs, JSOC units operate under Title 50 of the U.S. Code, which was controversially reinterpreted after 9/11 to permit the military to carry out "covert" actions, defined by the statute as foreign operations "where it is intended that the role of the United States will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly."

ONE OF the four Delta Force soldiers present that night was a 33-year-old from Michigan, Master Sgt. William "Billy" Lavigne II, whose violent life and cryptic death in the woods outside of Fort Bragg I wrote about for ROLLING STONE last year. Lavigne was a member of the Coast x Coast club and a good friend of Vallejo's. At the time Lavigne's path crossed Scanlon's, his cocaine habit was firmly established, but he remained a team member in good standing on Delta Force, and still had a clean arrest record in Cumberland County.

Scanlon never knew Lavigne, not by name. She only met him and Vallejo that one night in her life. One woman who was much better acquainted with both men, and the whole Coast x Coast crew, is an ex-soldier whom I'll call "Jane" for the sake of anonymity. During a stretch of Jane's military career, her social and professional circle overlapped with the five men, who made up the core of the motorcycle club, all active-duty soldiers on Delta Force. She has photos to prove that she knew them. "I was with them for years, constantly," she says.

Jane is out of the military now. She lives a very different life and has no contact with the elite soldiers who had been her colleagues, friends, and lovers for the better part of a decade. It had been, in retrospect, a dark period in her life, she says, a damaging, booze-soaked run of years in her twenties.

Jane was once deployed to a country in Southwest Asia and was stationed on the same base as a contingent from Delta Force. At times, she observed their operations on a video feed. "On deployment, they literally go around blasting people's brains out," she says. "They have zero remorse." She doesn't mean that any of the killings she witnessed were illegal or outside the rules of engagement. "It's very controlled," she

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHYLLIS B. DOONEY

says. "I don't think they go around on shooting sprees. But I know they don't feel how I would feel if I shot somebody."

She vividly recalls the day that one Delta soldier, a Coast x Coast guy (neither Vallejo nor Lavigne), came in from an operation outside the wire. "He had a dude's brains on his boot," she says, "and he just flicked it off," as if completely unfazed.

Stateside they lived intense lives, too. "We drank so much," she says. "Everything revolved around drinking booze and hooking up. I don't know how we survived."

Jane was well-acquainted with the site known as Warehouse 13. "Cris came up with the idea for getting this warehouse," she says. "They would have these epic parties, tailgate pool parties, where they would put a liner in the back of a truck and fill it up with water." On one occasion, they "hired midget wrestlers to come out," she says. They outfitted the warehouse with couches, a full bar, foosball and ping-pong tables, a stripper pole, and something called a Sybian. "It's like a saddle vibrator," she explains. "Once people started getting drunk, they would bust it out, and drunk girls would try it and get all horned up. That was how they operated."

There is "zero respect for women in that community," says an ex-soldier who dated a friend of Vallejo's. "It's like this across the whole of Special Forces."

This little black site of a party spot is situated directly across Worth Street from the Cumberland County jail, a "no-drone zone" that is the biggest law-enforcement facility in the county. The warehouse is three blocks from police headquarters, but a spokesman for the Fayetteville PD denies knowing anything about the place, and had no relevant incident reports pertaining to the address. The location was well-known, though, to other municipal authorities, who suspected it of being an illegal bar and a fire hazard, according to internal emails between city and county officials that I obtained.

Four months before the night in question, Cumberland County's Alcoholic Beverage Control received a tip from a police officer in Hope Mills, another satellite town of Fort Bragg, about "a party occurring in downtown [Fayetteville] in which 'donations' would be accepted," an ABC agent wrote in an affidavit attached to a warrant to search the warehouse and seize alcohol. The tipster "also indicated that drugs would be present," the affidavit attested.

Two ABC officers went to the location to check it out. "What we noted was a warehouse that appeared to pull double duty as a gym and party location," the ABC officer wrote in an email to a colleague. There were several people present, and the ABC officers learned that "the men were military with security clearances." Out of deference to their "service of our nation," the ABC officers let them off with a verbal warning.

Later that day, a city fire inspector went to the property and found multiple storage buildings in disrepair, surrounded by junked vehicles, barbecue grills, piles of wooden pallets, tiki torches, and other combustible materials. "This is a very secluded parcel," the fire marshal wrote in an email to the zoning department. "It appears that a lot goes on here."

Years of proximity to military violence, as well as a culture of functional alcoholism and casual sex, left Jane feeling "unworthy," "damaged," and "lost." Jane has dated multiple men on Delta Force at various times in her life. She's troubled by the memory of a night in 2012, when she woke up after having passed out drunk to find a man she knew having sex with her without her consent, she says. The next morning, she told the guy she was dating at the time that his buddy had raped her, but he didn't believe her, she says. Both men were on active duty in Delta Force at the time. There is "zero respect for women in that community," she says. "I know this was specifically Delta Force, but it's like this across the whole of USASOC," using an acronym for the U.S. Army's Special Operations Command.

Most Delta Force soldiers keep a very low profile. They avoid social media, and their traces on the internet tend to be very few: an old photo with mom, a defunct phone number, a real-estate deed. Vallejo is a notable exception. There are a dozen-plus local-news hits under his Anglicized name, Cris Valley, and a simple Google search turns up numerous photos and videos of him. In September 2015, he went on the Fox affiliate in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with a military dog named Gunner. In August 2016 – just two weeks before he met Scanlon – he threw out the first pitch at a Padres game in San Diego.

Jane never saw Vallejo doing drugs, and unlike Lavigne, he didn't run around getting arrested, but she remembers him being at the center of a social scene that she describes as "toxic." This was at the tail end of the Obama years, on the cusp of Trump's election. The wars that Delta Force had been on the bleeding edge of since 2001 had deteriorated into lost causes, but the special-operations forces had completed their takeover-from-within of the military, becoming the paramount force in the Pentagon, with the most political clout in Washington. In Fayetteville, the Coast x Coast club was riding high, leading "rock star" lifestyles, in Jane's words. "Those guys, they would drink, and they would need to have sex," she says. "They didn't care with who. It was drink, sex, drink, sex. They lived like there was no tomorrow."

The relentless physical drive that she describes is part of what made these men the very best at what they did. In the event of a terrorist strike, international hostage situation, or loose nuclear weapon, it's Delta or Team 6 that the president will call on to respond. Guys like Vallejo and Lavigne are constantly told that they're the elite, the best of the best, the ultimate badasses, and when it comes to killing and capturing people overseas, they are. In the military and in popular culture, their kind is revered. Among some operators, the result can be an "unhealthy sense of entitlement," in the words of a Special Operations Command internal ethics review made public in 2020. The hard-partying antics of the Coast x Coast club could certainly be seen as a manifestation of that sort of attitude, a sense of exemption from ordinary strictures and petty rules. As Jane puts it, "They did what they wanted when they wanted, and wouldn't take no for an answer."

A BRIEF REPORT by CBS 17 in Raleigh-Durham on Sept. 30 named Vallejo as an "N.C. soldier" who had been accused of rape, and published his photo. There's no doubt that he was charged in Cumberland County, yet strangely, there is no trace of his arraignment or indictment in a publicly accessible database of North Carolina court records. It's possible that it was expunged, a clerk tells me.

Vallejo was briefly detained in jail on a $100,000 bond. Thereafter, things moved very slowly toward a trial. Scanlon and Vallejo both continued to live in Fayetteville and work on Fort Bragg. It took her months to get a military protective order against him. On one occasion, she says, she had to hide in the bathroom after he walked into a tavern in Southern Pines. The police were called, and Vallejo left without incident.

Finally, the trial was set to begin in late-February 2018. Scanlon was looking forward to getting the ordeal over with. Then, just before the opening arguments were scheduled to take place, military lawyers from Fort Bragg intervened. They were officers in the Judge Advocate General's Corps, assigned to the Special Forces.

They convened a "weird meeting," Scanlon says, with her and the district attorney, Billy West, whose office declined to comment on this case or on Lavigne's record of arrests. "Mostly doing the talking, that I remember, was Capt. Joseph Morman," Scanlon says. "It was him and Maj. Stacey Cohen."

Army investigators with CID had initially washed their hands of the case, but the two JAG prosecutors, Morman and Cohen, claimed to have only belatedly learned that the victim and defendant were both soldiers, which gave the military parallel jurisdiction to try Vallejo. Scanlon recalls Morman urging her to consent to a change in venue, arguing that a court-martial offered a better chance to convict, among other

reasons, because a guilty verdict does not have to be unanimous under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

In fact, studies show that the conviction rate on penetrative-rape and forcible-sodomy charges is generally lower in military courts than civilian ones. And when it comes to courts-martial – for whatever crime – where the accused is a Navy SEAL or Green Beret, they can be more full of anomalies and surprises than a cheap legal thriller. Consider the bombshell testimony that relieved ex-SEAL Eddie Gallagher of murder charges in 2019 or Trump's intervention in the Fort Bragg court-martial of Mathew Golsteyn, a Special Forces officer who admitted on live TV to killing an unarmed man.

"I don't think there was an agenda there," says Col. Adam Kazin, chief of the Army JAG Corps' criminal-law division. "It was not a decision to try to sneak it out of Cumberland County." The only purpose of convening the meeting with the DA, Col. Kazin says, was to make sure that the JAG prosecutors understood whether Scanlon preferred to have a military or civilian trial. But he couldn't really explain why the Army waited 16 months to intervene on the eve of the trial, rather than let civilian justice take its course.

"It was very frustrating," Scanlon says, "that all these people had waited till the last minute, then were trying to put the decision on me, when I'm not a lawyer. I'm not a police officer. I had no idea why they were making me decide this. I defaulted to what the USASOC prosecutor and the DA would decide," and consented to removal of the case to Fort Bragg, which resulted in an unanticipated four-month delay. "I was pissed that another obstacle had gone up," she says. "I wanted this all behind me."

During this time, and the months to come, Scanlon was represented by an SVC, or special-victims' counsel, a military-appointed attorney. Her first SVC was at the meeting with the DA, but did not advise her that she might be better off pressing her case in civilian court. Subsequently, the Army swapped out her SVC four separate times. Some were deployed, others reassigned, or otherwise bureaucratically reshuffled. As a result, she says, she had to retell her ordeal to five different SVCs, some of whom were unprepared or missed meetings.

Finally, on June 25, 2018, the court-martial convened: *United States v. Sergeant First Class Cristobal Vallejo*. It was held in the main courthouse on Fort Bragg, a red-brick, Greek-revival building typical of the Carolinas. The trial began on a Monday morning. Though open to the public, no reporters were in the courtroom. "It was on a public docket, so people can go look it up," says Col. Kazin; however, "it was not necessarily on everyone's radar."

The Army never made a transcript of the court-martial, and destroyed the audio recordings as soon as it concluded, leaving no record of the testimony the witnesses gave, the arguments the lawyers made, or the judge's oral rulings. But Scanlon was in the courtroom on the first day of trial, and ROLLING STONE obtained the trial record, which includes a list of witnesses, the lawyers' written motions, the judge's orders, his instructions to the jury, and other documents that make it possible to reconstruct much – if not nearly enough – of what happened.

Vallejo, wearing his full-dress uniform, was seated at the defense table, next to his defense attorney, Kris Poppe, a former JAG prosecutor who previously served as an infantry officer. The jury panel of nine included two women and was a mix of colonels, majors, and senior sergeants, all of whom served in the Special Forces. They would have been able to see from the many badges, patches, stripes, and braids on Vallejo's embroidered blue coat that he was a military superstar, a veteran operator of the sort that all of USASOC exists to support. He had entered a plea of not guilty. He never denied having sex with Scanlon, but maintained that it was consensual.

Even with the rape kit and the testimony of witnesses like Tina, much would have hinged on Scanlon's credibility. She was the first witness called to the stand, on day one. The jury would have been able to see from her dress blues that, in stark contrast with Vallejo, she was a rookie officer in a conventional unit. "I had no deployment stripes," Scanlon says. "No unit patch. No awards. Because I had been in for 18 months. And he's sitting there decked out. You want to think they're not comparing?"

Scanlon says the defense tried to "slut-shame me." And the judge allowed her own lawyer to testify against her, which she calls "a crazy ethical mistake."

According to Scanlon, Poppe's initial line of questioning was not subtle. She says he grilled her on the quantity of alcohol she had consumed, implying that inebriety had inclined her toward promiscuity. To buttress his depiction of her as a woman on the prowl, he put up photos of her taken that night in which she was wearing a sleeveless dress with a short skirt, and texts between her and Tina joking about going out "braless" or "commando."

"Isn't it true you were flirting with him?" she recalls him asking. "Weren't there plenty of people you could have called out to? It wasn't really that dark out."

"I don't remember the precise questions that I asked her," Poppe says today, "or what exhibits were introduced in evidence," but "I remember the facts of the case," and "the evidence supported that she consented to the sexual acts with Cris Valley."

A major weakness for the defense was Scanlon's apparent absence of a motive to fabricate a rape claim, complete with a trip to the hospital and all. In this regard, Poppe says that she was a commissioned officer – a lieutenant – who got caught having sex in a "compromising position" with an enlisted man, Vallejo, technically her military inferior. Because she was already guilty of one instance of fraternization, with the staff sergeant to whose house she had been headed to that night, she had a motive to lie and pretend that the encounter with Vallejo was nonconsensual, in Poppe's theory of the case.

But Scanlon didn't get "caught" with the staff sergeant, nor with Vallejo. Her superiors didn't know about the former, and she herself had reported the latter. If her aim was to avoid disciplinary action or professional embarrassment, she could have simply said nothing and no one would have been the wiser. But pressing this line of inquiry served a clear ulterior purpose, Scanlon says: "Trying to slut-shame me, and say that I did that all the time."

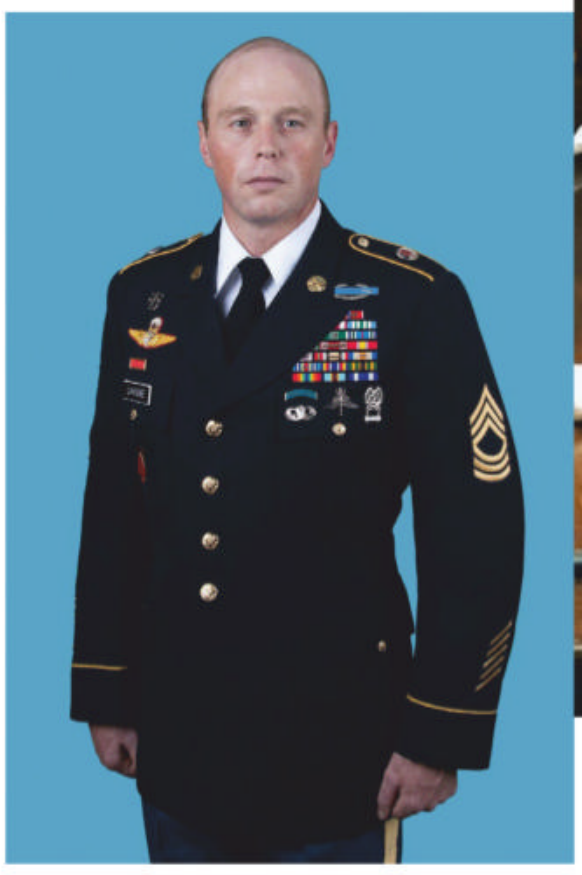
Poppe says he "take[s] exception" to this "absurd" characterization. All of his questions were directed at Scanlon's honesty and candor, he says. He maintains that Scanlon and Vallejo were witnessed in the act by people at the warehouse that night. That would have been enough, Poppe argues, to spook Scanlon into making a false accusation of rape, lest word get out and she be reprimanded for fraternization.

Because of societal prejudices toward women's sexuality, and the potential for abuse, "rape shield" laws, including Military Rule of Evidence 412, generally block defense attorneys from bringing up an accuser's sexual history at trial. But the instructions to the jury show that the judge, Col. Jeffrey Nance, allowed the panel to consider Scanlon's relationship with the staff sergeant insofar as it was probative of "her motive, if any, to fabricate her allegations against the accused." The judge cautioned the panel that they were forbidden to conclude that Scanlon, having willingly slept with one enlisted man, was likely to do it again; but to use an old legal cliché, that was a bit like throwing a skunk into the jury box and instructing the jurors not to smell it.

Scanlon was on the stand for eight hours, she says. "My testimony was so long and painful." Throughout, she rigidly refused to make eye contact with Vallejo or even look at his side of the courtroom. Twice she broke down in tears and the court had to call a recess, she says. Finally, at the end of the first day of trial, she was allowed to step down.

The rest of the court-martial is a black box to her, because she spent it sequestered in the prosecution's witness room, which she says she was not permitted to leave. This would have been

Three Mysterious Murders
Below: Master Sgt. Lavigne, a senior Delta Force operator, suffered from addiction and PTSD. Right: Lavigne (left) with best friend and fellow Green Beret Mark Leshikar. Lavigne shot and killed Leshikar three months before he took the stand as a witness to defend Vallejo in 2018. In December 2020, Lavigne and Army veteran Timothy Dumas (inset) were found murdered on Army training grounds near Fort Bragg. The case remains unsolved.



in violation of regulations that prevent the military from excluding crime victims from the trials of their alleged perpetrators, and USASOC says it didn't happen. "Scanlon was not excluded from the proceeding," a spokesman wrote in a statement.

Either way, Scanlon was immersed in an unfamiliar process and taking her cues from military lawyers and the judge, all of whom outranked her. Even if she weren't actually barred from the trial by order of the court, she believed that she had to stay in the witness room until called, and according to Scanlon, the SVC did nothing to correct the misapprehension.

The trial record shows that the prosecution called only four more witnesses, half as many as the defense. Besides Scanlon, the only people who testified for the government were Tina, the staff sergeant, the nurse who did the rape kit, and the friend who encouraged Scanlon to go to the police. Efforts to reach these people by phone were unsuccessful. The prosecution did not call Matrafailo, the Fayetteville detective who had investigated Scanlon's claim, interviewed witnesses while their memories were fresh, collected evidence before it disappeared, and concluded by arresting Vallejo for second-degree rape.

Instead, on June 26, Matrafailo was the first person called to the stand by the *defense*. Poppe couldn't recall why that was the case, but conceded that it was somewhat unusual for the main police witness in a criminal trial not to align with the prosecution. Poppe was unable to remember the substance of Matrafailo's testimony, only that it involved "some aspects of the investigation that had not been discussed."

A few months after the trial, Matrafailo would be accused of making inappropriate contact with Scanlon on social media: sending her suggestive emojis, making weird comments about ads for lingerie, and the like. The police department promptly fired Matrafailo, who had allegedly done the same to two other alleged rape victims. "It was shocking," Scanlon told *The Fayetteville Observer* in 2019, and "honestly a little bit unbelievable." (Attempts to reach Matrafailo by phone were unsuccessful.)

The trial record shows that Vallejo's defense called eight additional witnesses. The three Delta operators who had been at the warehouse that night took the stand, as did the retired bomb technician, the two civil-affairs officers, and the dancing bartender, as well as the red-haired widow. Attempts to reach these people by phone were unsuccessful, but pretrial filings show that at least two of them were summoned to buttress Vallejo's defense of consent.

In a motion dated June 12, the defense stated that one of the civil-affairs officers was expected to testify that she had observed "close, friendly, and flirtatious interaction" between Vallejo and Scanlon all night. In the same filing, the defense notified the court of its intent to call the Green Beret's widow, who would testify that she "walked past the portable toilet and saw Cris with the blond girl having sex on a car," and that "the female was obviously enjoying it."

This was the red-haired woman whom Scanlon had briefly glimpsed during the alleged assault, a detail she had failed to relate to police. The apparent lapse in memory had given Poppe an opening to hammer away at her credibility. "Why didn't you tell anyone about the witness that came around the corner?" she remembers him asking. She felt the implication was clear: "Obviously you're a liar."

Scanlon's testimony was that she had told her special-victims' counsel about seeing the Green Beret's widow, albeit months after the fact, and that she had instructed the SVC to inform the prosecution of her belated recollection. Seeking to impeach Scanlon's credibility and establish that she had tried to conceal the existence of an eyewitness, Poppe sought and obtained the SVC's testimony on this point. Though attorney-client privilege normally protects the SVC-client relationship, Judge Nance found that Scanlon had waived the privilege by including the prosecution in the supposed conversation with her SVC. Nance's legal reasoning may have been sound, but it still resulted in a rape counselor providing testimony against her own client at trial, a result that another judge might have bent over backward to avoid.

"I represented 1LT [First Lieutenant] Erin Scanlon as her special-victim counsel," Capt. Alycia Stokes' written testimony read. "1LT Scanlon never told me that she remembered seeing a female" – the Green Beret's red-haired widow – "who may have witnessed a portion of the alleged assault."

It looked like Scanlon was lying, or at a minimum, misremembering what had happened. "She wasn't credible," Poppe says. "She wasn't being truthful about her encounter with Cris Vallejo."

"They should not have allowed my lawyer to testify against me," Scanlon says. "That was a crazy ethical mistake."

MASTER SGT. WILLIAM LAVIGNE was the sixth witness for the defense, the trial record shows. At the time, he was so depressed, anxious, guilt-stricken, and strung out on drugs that it's a wonder he was able to put on his full-dress uniform that morning. As I wrote in "The Fort Bragg Murders," Lavigne's dozen-plus deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and elsewhere had left him addled with trauma and addicted to hard drugs and alcohol. He was a broken operator, a worn-out military part, destroyed by PTSD and substance abuse.

Just three months before he was called to the stand, in March 2018, at Lavigne's [*Cont. on 80*]

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF LAURA LESHIKAR; U.S. ARMY; FBI

UNIVERSAL
UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO

FOR YOUR GRAMMY® CONSIDERATION

GRAMMY® NOMINEE

ZOÉ

"Immersive and lush sonic backdrops... On their seventh release, the band fuses psychedelic-tinged euphoria with sparkly keys and lush guitars"
– **PASTE**

"brimming with driving synthesizer riffs and textures, and eminent melodies all infused with the trademark romantic longing of León Larregui's voice and lyrics."
–**ALL MUSIC**

"BEST LATIN ROCK OR ALTERNATIVE ALBUM"

Sonidos de Karmática Resonancia

"With Sonidos de Karmatica Resonancia, Zoé's alt-rock enigma shows a proggier side, twisting and turning with rhythmic bursts and occasional twinkling keys"
– **ROLLING STONE**

"For two decades, Zoé have spun fantastic tales of otherworldly love and lucid dream explorations, all against a luminous rock backdrop that could easily induce visions of travelling through time and space.
– **ROLLING STONE**

Reviews

Music

TAYLOR REMAKES A CLASSIC

Swift's rerecording of 'Red' finds new depth, power, and wisdom in a landmark album

By ROB SHEFFIELD

Taylor Swift
Red (Taylor's Version)
REPUBLIC
★★★★★

EVER SINCE Taylor Swift announced she was dropping *Red (Taylor's Version)*, remaking her 2012 classic, anticipation has run high. But since she specializes in doing the impossible, here's yet another insane idea she's brought to life: the new *Red* is even bigger, glossier, deeper, casually crueler. It's the ultimate version of her most gloriously ambitious megapop manifesto.

Red is the second chapter of her Taylor's Version project, after *Fearless,* redoing her old albums even though she's hitting her fiercest creative peak right now. Nothing on this scale has been tried before. This is a leap, even from the girl who invented the whole concept of "Never looking down." ➔

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18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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Protect your downloadings from Big brother
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18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
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TAYLOR SWIFT

The showstopper: her long-lost 10-minute version of "All Too Well." Swift takes her own masterpiece, tears it all up, and rebuilds it into a new heartbreak epic, twice as long and twice as mad. In other words, her greatest song just got greater. It's beyond belief she didn't release this until now. But it's beyond belief it even exists. "All Too Well (10 Minute Version)" is the climax for *Red (Taylor's Version)* – the original 16-song *Red* plus B sides and vault outtakes, all redone with more boom and detail in the production.

Red used to be her greatest album – at least until *Folklore* and *Evermore* came along. It's where she proved herself not just the supreme pop songwriter of her generation, but one of the all-timers. *Red* wasn't her first masterwork, but it's the one that established the Swiftian universe as a place where every lost scarf is a ticking time bomb that can take years to explode into a song.

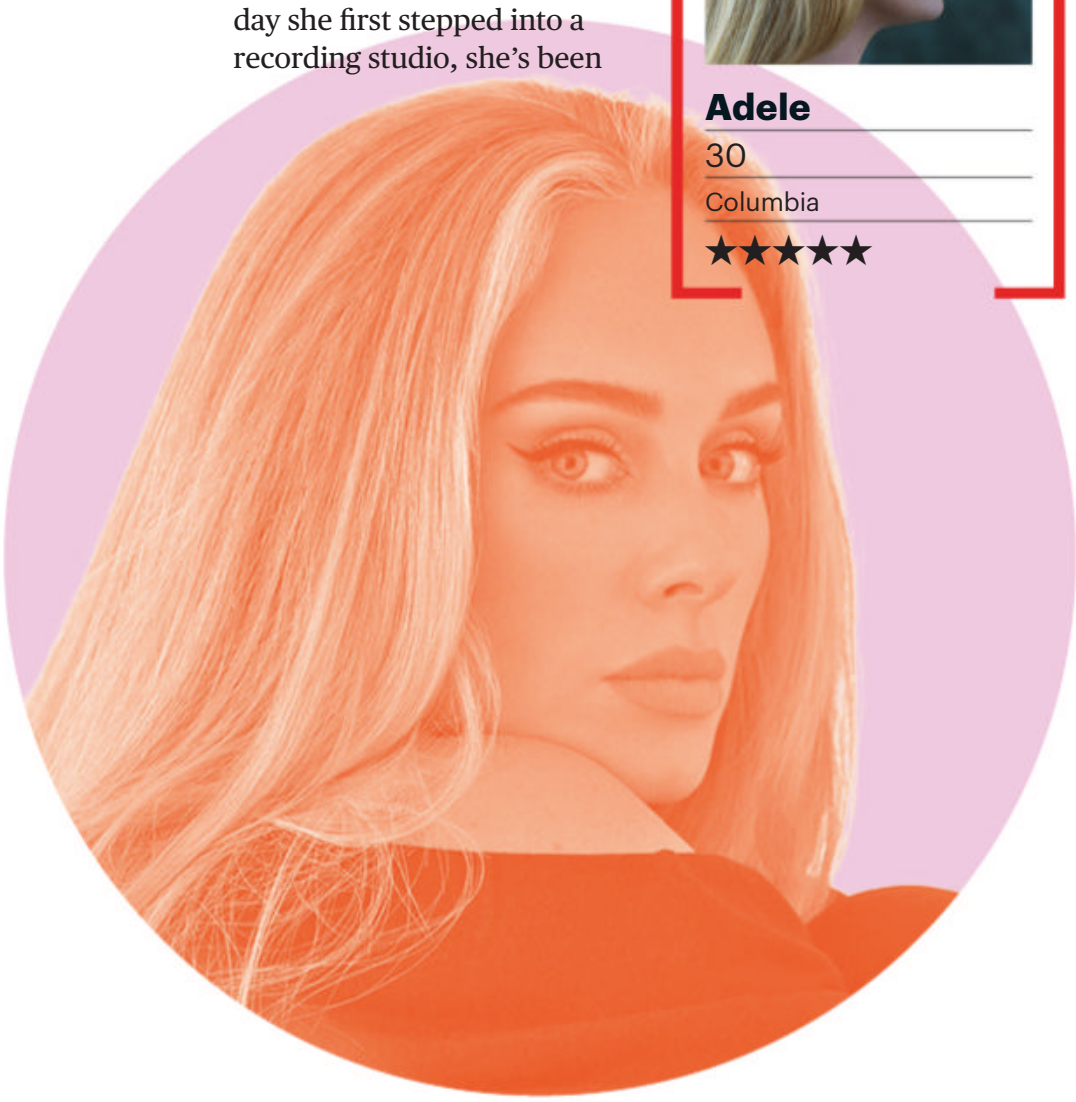
The challenge of *Red (Taylor's Version)* was how to remake an unimprovable original. Hidden gems like "I Almost Do" or "Sad Beautiful Tragic" would be career highlights for nearly anyone else, but here they're overshadowed by even loftier tunes. As on *Fearless,* her adult voice adds new power to these songs. "Nothing New" is the prize of the vault songs – a duet with kindred spirit Phoebe Bridgers, asking, "How can a person know everything at 18 but nothing at 22?" Can we get a Taylor-Phoebe album?

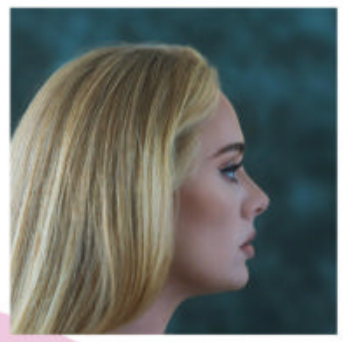
Swift finally does her own proper studio versions of "Better Man" and "Babe," country hits she gave away to other artists. "Message in a Bottle" and "The Very First Night" go for dance-pop zing. She teams up with Ed Sheeran for "Run," an acoustic duet written the day they met. "I Bet You Think About Me" is a rowdy country duet with Chris Stapleton, baiting a posh ex about his "organic shoes" and "cool indie-music concerts." It's the kind of Nashville hit she was about to leave behind, with her twang on display.

But that's the amazing thing about *Red (Taylor's Version)* – it's a tribute to how far she's traveled, yet it makes you even more excited for where she's heading next. This is the golden age of something good and right and real. And for Swift, the golden age is really just beginning.

ADELE'S RETURN TO GLORY

The wait for '30' was worth it – the singer's fourth album is her best ever By ROB SHEFFIELD





Adele
30
Columbia
★★★★★

"MUMMY'S BEEN having a lot of big feelings recently," Adele announces early on in *30*. Hands up – who's surprised? This is Adele, after all. She was born with big feelings, and ever since the day she first stepped into a recording studio, she's been brilliant at sharing them with the world. If you were expecting this woman's divorce album to be a smooth ride, you're in the wrong place.

Adele has never sounded more ferocious than she does on *30* – more alive to her own feelings, more virtuosic at shaping them into songs in the key of her own damn life. It's her toughest, most powerful album yet. She travels her own Via Dolorosa, walking a treacherous path of heartache, motherhood, boozy despair, and loneliness.

This is Adele's first album since the collapse of her marriage – as she summed it up, "Divorce, baby." But it's also her turning-30 statement, so she's navigating a host of turbulent emotional transitions. The music is full of time-traveling R&B grooves, going back to old-school Seventies soul for "Hold On" and "Strangers by Nature." As she sings in the dub-soul trip "Cry Your Heart Out," "I created this storm/It's only fair I have to sit in its rain."

Adele's voice is a tank division that can tap dance –the more mature she gets as an artist, the more finesse she brings to the microphone, without sacrificing any of her primal firepower. You wouldn't think it was possible, but her voice just keeps getting stronger. In the hit "Easy on Me," she pauses midsong to linger on the first note of "easy" so long you feel like you might pass out, even though you can tell she isn't breaking a sweat.

"I Drink Wine" is a career highlight that takes inspiration from Elton John. She grapples with feelings so fierce, she can't share them with anyone except the mirror, the couch, the second or third empty bottle of the night, a gospel choir, and a planet full of sentient humans wired to every tremble of her voice. She goes for wild-ass humor as she sings, "When I was a child every single thing could blow my mind/Soaking it all up for fun, but now I only soak up wine."

Adele hits new highs in "To Be Loved," a vocal fireworks display with just a piano to guide her. She breaks down and admits, "Let it be known that I cried for you." And then punches the word "known" over and over until it gushes blood. It's an exhilarating moment – like the rest of the album, it's the sound of a woman fighting her way out of an emotional crisis. All over *30*, you can hear her sense of triumph that she made it all the way through. Hello, from the other side.

FROM TOP: SIMON EMMETT; KEN HANSEN

Díaz

BREAKING

Álvaro Díaz Moves Reggaeton Forward

RAPPER ÁLVARO Díaz has been a figure in reggaeton for years, and this year his profile got a bit of a bump when he co-wrote several tracks on Rauw Alejandro's album *Vice Versa*. Díaz's music has often been driven by alternative sounds, and lately the industry has started moving toward his eclectic aesthetic. His new album, *Felicilandia,* exudes a playfully mopey vision. "Babysita </3" goes from acoustic tune to experimental R&B, while "Close Friends" and "Llori Pari," featuring Feid and Tainy, have an endearing bittersweetness — reflecting his concept for an album about "a place where sad kids can go to be happy." **JULYSSA LOPEZ**

★★★★★ Classic | ★★★★ Excellent | ★★★ Good | ★★ Fair | ★ Poor RATINGS ARE SUPERVISED BY THE EDITORS OF ROLLING STONE.

Quick Hits

Ten new albums you need to know about now

Anuel AA
Las Leyendas Nunca Mueren
Real Hasta la Muerte

ANUEL A+ The Puerto Rican rapper's third album is full of on-brand swagger while also displaying a new maturity, rekindling his OG trapero flame without turning his back on pop or the club.

★★★★☆

Neil Young and Crazy Horse
Barn
Reprise

YOUNG AT HEART Young is lovestruck one minute, incensed over the state of man the next. But those sturdy melodies, scalding guitars, and sweet Crazy Horse harmonies never let him down.

★★★½☆

Alicia Keys
Keys
RCA

SOUL QUEEN Keys' latest is a double LP. The first disc shows her total mastery of the pop form, from Seventies soul to Nat King Cole. Disc Two brings it into the present, with guests like Swae Lee and Khalid.

★★★½☆

Tierra Whack
Rap?
Interscope

RAP ATTACK R&B innovator Whack made waves with an album of one-minute songs. Here, she delivers a concise three-song EP that shape-shifts, hits hard, and forwards her multifaceted story.

★★★½☆

Arca
i--iiii
XL

MOUNTAIN OF SOUND An astonishing — at times overwhelming — four-album, 47-track, two-and-a-half-hour release from the avant-garde producer, envisioning a world beyond identity and genre.

★★★½☆

Monsta X
The Dreaming
BMG

SWEET DREAM With many K-pop artists leaning toward rap, this internationally ascendant crew draws on vintage boy-band sounds on an album that's as fine-tuned as a pop record could be.

★★★½☆

Alison Krauss and Robert Plant
Raise the Roof
Rounder

TOGETHER AGAIN The bluegrass icon and Led Zep legend had a surprise hit with 2007's *Raising Sand*. Their second LP has a similar beauty and mystery with covers of Calexico, Merle Haggard, and others.

★★★½☆

Lumineers
Brightside
Dualtone

HAPPIER TRAILS This Colorado duo remain masters of arena-roots music. Their latest won't surprise anyone, but its upbeat feel and finely wrought prettiness will satisfy Luministas for sure.

★★★☆☆

Sting
The Bridge
A&M

BROAD BRIDGE The spiritually determined tone of Sting's latest is shaped by the pandemic. There are moments that'll sate Policeheads, along with jazz touches, folk storytelling, and an Otis Redding reading.

★★★☆☆

Snoop Dogg
...Presents the Algorithm
Def Jam

PACK LEADER Snoop wants to build a bond between Gen Z and oldheads on his first album as a Def Jam exec, curating a set of new artists and vets. It'd be nice if more of his lovable self came through.

★★½☆☆

CONTRIBUTORS: DAVID BROWNE, TIM CHAN, JON DOLAN, MOSI REEVES, GARY SUAREZ

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: STEPHEN J. COHEN/GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES; NBCU PHOTO BANK/GETTY IMAGES; DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE; GUS STEWART/REDFERNS; CHRISTOPHER POLK/NBC/NBCU PHOTO BANK/GETTY IMAGES

UPDATE

OLD SOUNDS AND FRESH STORIES

Two excellent indie folk artists tell their restless New York stories

IN THE decade since Anaïs Mitchell's last record, the Vermont singer-songwriter created the eight-times-Tony-winning musical *Hadestown* and joined supergroup Bonny Light Horseman. Her new self-titled LP extends the murky, revelatory folk of the latter, with wistful reflections on the passing of time and free-falling in love. "I want everything I want," she sings on the spellbinding piano ballad "Brooklyn Bridge," turning a late-night cab ride into something holy. The best song on the latest from fellow New England-raised folkie Aoife O'Donovan is also a meditation on traversing NYC. "B61," a tune about finding love, however temporary, in Red Hook, Brooklyn, is just one of several stunning moments of textured roots music on her first solo collection since 2016. Amid gentle piano and fluttering guitar, O'Donovan meditates on road-tripping to Neil Young ("Age of Apathy"), finds deep meaning in a rescued bird ("Sister Starling"), and collapses time on "What Do You Want From Yourself?," a title that sums up this album's self-searching power.

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Anaïs Mitchell
Anaïs Mitchell
★★★★☆

Aoife O'Donovan
Age of Apathy
★★★½☆

Clockwise from right: Cena weirds out Holland, Agee, Iwuji, and Brooks.

T.V.

A WAR ON SELF-SERIOUS SUPERHEROES

Writer-director James Gunn's 'Peacemaker' is a gloriously goofy sendup and sincere character study in one

Peacemaker

NETWORK	HBO Max
AIR DATE	Jan. 13
STARRING	John Cena Danielle Brooks Freddie Stroma Jennifer Holland Robert Patrick

★★★★☆

ALAN SEPINWALL

ANY DOUBT that *Peacemaker* would have the same energy, style, and sense of humor that writer-director James Gunn brought to last year's feature film *The Suicide Squad* is dispelled within seconds of the superhero show's opening-credits sequence. It is essentially an Eighties-style music video, with the homicidal title character, played once again by John Cena, and his supporting cast performing a choreographed dance number on a neon-lit stage while the Norwegian glam-metal band Wig Wam's "Do Ya Wanna Taste It" shreds in the background.

It's the kind of inspired gag that makes a mockery of the Skip Intro option, remaining a delight every single time it comes up. But then, the same could be said for ol' bucket-headed Peacemaker himself. He was one of many amusing flavors in Gunn's mocking take on *Suicide Squad*, and here he ably carries the whole ridiculous yet also thrilling and sad endeavor. He's the star of an unapologetic parody of superhero shows that's also a pretty good superhero show in its own right.

In the movie, Peacemaker was something of an alt-right caricature, and ultimately an antagonist to the more sympathetic Squadders. Here, he is given friends, including Freddie Stroma as a fellow homicidal vigilante called, well, Vigilante, and Danielle Brooks, Jennifer Holland, Steve A gee, and Chukwudi Iwuji as spies who recruit Peacemaker to take down a mysterious threat to America. And he is given both context and surprising amounts of sympathy, as we see that his father, Auggie (Robert Patrick, going for it), is an abusive white supremacist who loudly declares that he should have slit his son's throat at birth. Peacemaker is a trash person, but he was raised to be that way, and the show makes him just repentant and self-aware enough for him to function as the hero of this extremely odd story. "Lately, I just think I'm a fucking maniac," he confesses to Vigilante. "I'm having feelings about things."

Stroma as Vigilante's alter ego, Adrian Chase

KATIE YU/HBO MAX

Those moments of reflection wind up complementing the comedy rather than undercutting it. Peacemaker remains an insensitive moron much of the time, admitting in one episode that for years he believed his older brother's explanation that ugly children were "butt babies" who came out of their mothers' rear ends. By now it's not a surprise that Cena is a gifted comic actor – more versatile and game than Dwayne Johnson, even if the Rock's magnetism is undeniable – and Gunn (who writes and/or directs most of the episodes himself) leans on his star's verbal gifts as much as his physical ones. Those opening credits are far from the last time we see Cena dancing with hilarious abandon (often to more Scandinavian throwback rock, and at least once in nothing but a pair of tighty-whities), but he's also great in scenes where Peacemaker's mouth gets him into trouble, like when he starts arguing with grade schoolers while he's a special guest at show-and-tell. He is a (really) overgrown child, and the series acknowledges this even as it lets his co-stars shine. Stroma (who usually just plays dashing, handsome men in dramas like *Bridgerton*) is especially ridiculous in portraying Vigilante as a worst-case scenario for what Peacemaker could be.

Vigilante already appeared in dead-serious form on the CW's *Arrow*. But like its comrade in HBO Max weirdness *Doom Patrol*, *Peacemaker* takes a fundamentally irreverent approach to the superhero genre as a whole and to DC Comics in particular. Peacemaker claims that Superman has a poop fetish and name-checks obscure DC characters like Bat-Mite and Matter-Eater Lad. Where Disney+ shows like *Loki* are cogs in a much larger Marvel storytelling machine, Gunn seems to have been left alone in his own filthy corner of the DC universe. Each episode features a post-credits scene,

ALWAYS STUCK IN SECOND GEAR

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING with your goddamn life?" Sam's sister Tricia asks her in the first episode of this dramedy. In the moment, Sam (Bridget Everett) acts offended by the question, but it's one she privately asks herself all the time. She is in her forties, has never had any real direction, and only returned to her Kansas hometown to care for their other sister, Holly, as she died from cancer; then she stayed for lack of a better plan. Sam befriends former high school classmate Joel (Jeff Hiller) and confesses she never amounted to much "because I didn't think I was any good." When Joel asks what she's referring to, she replies, "Everything."

Somebody Somewhere was created by Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen and produced by Jay and Mark Duplass. The Duplass brothers' previous HBO series, the terrific but short-lived *Togetherness,* also dealt with middle-aged disappointment, and shares a knock-around, low-fi charm with its successor. (And, for that matter, with many of the best episodes of *High Maintenance,* for which Bos and Thureen previously wrote.) Very little happens over the course of the seven-episode season, but this is the point. And it makes the small victories and minor defeats ring out much more loudly than if Sam's life were a nonstop thrill ride.

Hagerty helps Everett take aim.

Somebody Somewhere

NETWORK	HBO
AIR DATE	Jan. 16
STARRING	Bridget Everett Jeff Hiller Mary Catherine Garrison Mike Hagerty Murray Hill

★★★½☆

Everett is a comedian who appeared regularly on *Inside Amy Schumer,* where she got to close each season by belting out raunchy cabaret songs with titles like "Put Your Dick Away." The singing continues here – the first episode climaxes with Sam and Joel sharing a touching duet of Peter Gabriel and Kate Bush's "Don't Give Up" at an event he hosts for the local queer community – but Hiller and his unnervingly varied range of smiles do most of the comic heavy lifting in what's otherwise a dryly amusing series. Everett, by contrast, plays things seriously, and well. She's an intensely watchable presence as we witness Sam trudge through an office job she hates, fend off passive-aggressiveness from Tricia (Mary Catherine Garrison), and try to persuade their father, Ed (Mike Hagerty), to seek treatment for their alcoholic mother, Mary Jo (Jane Brody). Sam may be down on herself, but the show about her turns out to be good at a lot of things. A.S.

→ PEACEMAKER

but rather than tease characters from upcoming shows and movies, they're just extended versions of comedy bits from earlier in the hour.

The budget is clearly more modest than the ones Gunn had to work with in *Suicide Squad* or the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films, making for a striking contrast in production values whenever we get flashback clips from Peacemaker's big-screen adventure. But Gunn remains an inventive writer and director of action even within these limitations, and each episode features at least one absurdly choreographed fight scene, whether it's the lumbering Peacemaker struggling against the diminutive but quick Judomaster (Nhut Le), or getting some graphically violent assistance from his pet eagle/best friend, Eagly (a marvelous CGI creation). It is not a show for the faint of heart, though Gunn and his collaborators frequently manage to make the gore part of the joke.

Between the blood and guts, the slapstick, the political satire (Peacemaker's two favorite words often seem to be "deep state"), and the musical digressions (including a married couple debating the merits of Cinderella versus Foster the People during a hostage situation), there is a lot going on here. Yet the series functions as a sincere character study of its flawed hero – and the unfortunate souls who have to work alongside him – just enough for the joke to never quite wear thin. Even in a wildly oversaturated market for tales of hypermuscular men and women punching their way to justice, *Peacemaker* stands out. You'll wanna taste it, even the parts that are in incredibly bad taste. R

CHUCK HODES/HBO

CAPED CRUSADE
Pattinson puts on the mask in *The Batman*.

25 MUST-SEE MOVIES FOR 2022

From 'The Batman' to 'Avatar 2,' the blockbusters and big titles we can't wait to catch this year

By DAVID FEAR

Aline
Jan. 21

Once upon a time, a girl growing up in Quebec discovered she has a world-class singing voice. She met a manager who steered her to fame, fortune, and global superstardom; he also married her. After embracing her destiny as a pop diva, she settled into a lucrative residency in Las Vegas. If this story sounds somewhat familiar, it's because that's exactly what happened to Celine Dion – only writer-director-star Valérie Lemercier is portraying a fictional version of Ms. Dion, named Aline Dieu, in what is a biopic by any other name. The French actor is also playing the singer from ages five (!) to 55. Our hearts will go on, indeed.

Morbius
Jan. 28

Comic-book readers of a certain age may remember a Spider-Man villain known as Morbius, a biochemist by day and "living vampire" by night. And because Sony is raiding its Spidey-character back catalog for crossover movie ideas, we now get a stand-alone origin story in which one Michael Morbius (Jared Leto) decides to try some experimental and fairly extreme methods to treat his own rare blood disease. The side effects include superhuman strength, a sensitivity to light, the occasional transformation into a monster, and a taste for Type O. At least now Leto has some fangs to help chew the scenery! Matt Smith, Tyrese Gibson, and Jared Harris co-star.

The Worst Person in the World
Feb. 4

Norway's selection for the Best International Feature Oscar follows Julie (Renate Reinsve), a woman trying to figure out a career, an age-appropriate lifestyle, and something resembling a future as she slouches into her thirties. A relationship with a cartoonist (Anders Danielsen Lie) seems to hold promise for a while. So, too, does a dalliance with a man (Herbert Nordrum) she meets at a party. Mostly, Julie just wants to avoid being . . . well, see title. A huge hit on the festival circuit, the latest from Joachim Trier (*Reprise*) is easily his best film in years – and is about to become your new favorite 21st-century romantic dramedy.

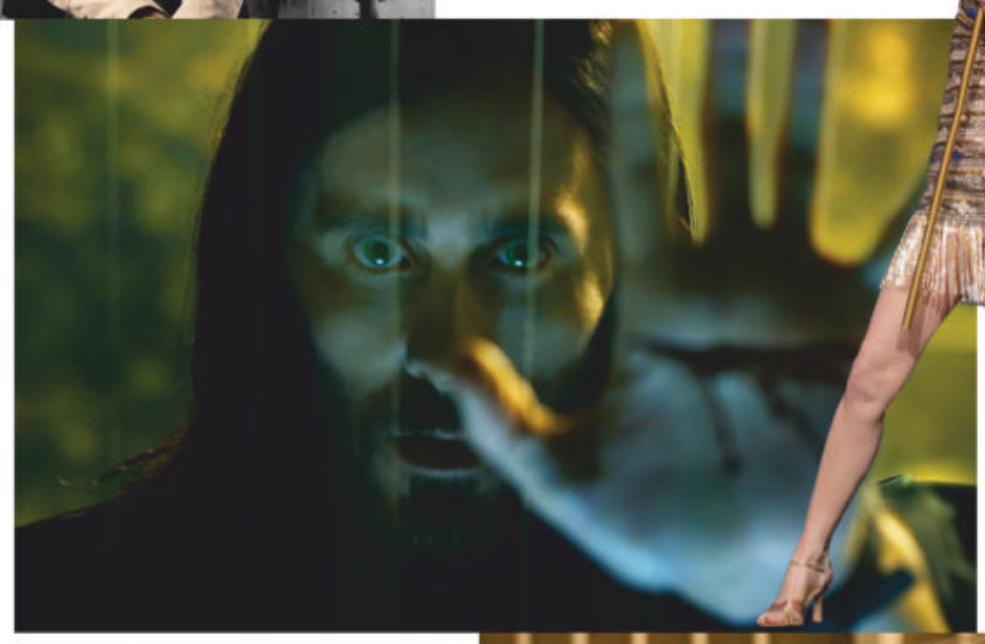
SMOKE SIGNALS
Lie and Reinsve in *The Worst Person in the World*

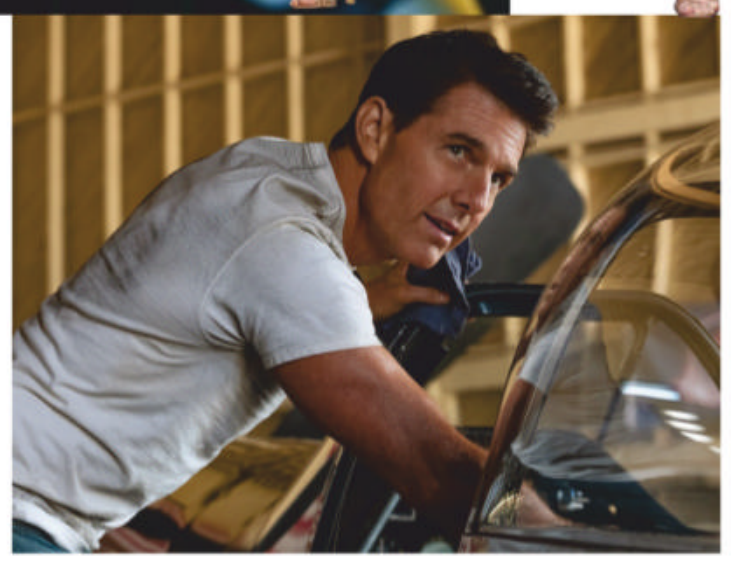
Uncharted
Feb. 18

Speaking of Spider-Man: Tom Holland takes a break from webslinger duties to play Nathan Drake, the globe-trotting, treasure-hunting hero of the popular video-game series who has a gift for getting into life-or-death scrapes. A sort of prequel to his PlayStation adventures, this movie rewinds to Drake's early days, when his mentor (Mark Wahlberg) was teaching the kid some tricks and helping him hunt for clues regarding his missing brother. Quicker than you can say "So, he's like Lara Croft but a young dude?" Drake is running along roofs, solving puz-

FROM TOP: JONATHAN OLLEY/WARNER BROS. PICTURES; OSLO PICTURES

zles, falling out of airplanes, and trying to avoid Antonio Banderas' ruthless bad guy. Ruben Fleischer (*Zombieland*) directs.





The Batman

March 4

In the future, Andy Warhol declared that every actor will take a crack at playing Batman for 15 minutes (we're paraphrasing slightly here) – and now it's Robert Pattinson's turn. The former *Twilight* heartthrob turned consciously art-house-weird movie star gives us a moody caped crusader, right at the beginning of his career dedicated to cleaning up Gotham City. Paul Dano is the Riddler, here reimagined as a particularly nasty serial killer targeting the rich and famous. Zoë Kravitz makes for a particularly slinky Selina Kyle, a.k.a. Catwoman, and Colin Farrell is virtually unrecognizable as the Penguin. If director Matt Reeves can do for the Dark Knight what he did for giant monsters with *Cloverfield*, this could be better than your average superhero joint.

Bullet Train

April 8

The international assassin community is, we're told, a pretty close-knit bunch – so it isn't surprising when a professional killer with the handle "Ladybug" (Brad Pitt) finds himself recognizing some of his peers on a Japanese bullet train while he's on a job. The question is, how are all of them on the same speeding train? Do all of their respective hits happen to have some sort of common connection? And more important: Who may be setting them up, and why? Sandra Bullock, Zazie Beetz, Brian Tyree Henry, and Aaron Taylor-Johnson play the other killers; Michael Shannon and Bad Bunny are also along for the ride. Considering that this adaptation of Kôtarô Isaka's pulp crime novel is being directed by *John Wick*'s David Leitch, you should expect carnage, and a lot of it.

Next Goal Wins

2022

Thomas Rongen had been a soccer coach for years when, in 2011, the former defensive midfielder was hired to head up the national American Samoa team.

They weren't exactly considered contenders. If you've seen the 2014 documentary on his tenure, you know what happened next – and if you haven't, then writer-director Taika Waititi's feature-film take on how the coach whipped a ragtag bunch of players into shape will fill you in. Throw in Michael Fassbender as Rongen and, boom, your itch for an uplifting sports-underdog comedy starring a handsome movie star will be properly scratched.

The Northman

April 22

Fess up: You've been dying to see a good Viking revenge saga for a long time now. Filmmaker Robert Eggers (*The Witch*, *The Lighthouse*) has your back: He's put together a star-studded tale of a Norse warrior (Alexander Skarsgård) seeking vengeance against the death of his father, with Nicole Kidman, Anya Taylor-Joy, Willem Dafoe, Ethan Hawke, and Claes Bang donning furs and horned helmets right alongside him. Also, Björk shows up as a character named "the Slav Witch," so it's got that going for it as well.

VAMPIRES, SINGERS, AND SORCERERS Clockwise from top left: *Uncharted* (Wahlberg and Holland); *John Wick* (Reeves); *Aline* (Lemercier); *Top Gun* (Cruise); *Doctor Strange* (Cumberbatch); and *Morbius* (Leto)

Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness

May 6

"Madness" seems to be the key word regarding this new MCU entry, which ended up switching directors (goodbye, Scott Derrickson; hello, Sam Raimi), has apparently undergone Covid-related reshoots, and looks to connect a number of recent Marvel narratives from both the big screen (*Spider-Man: No Way Home*) and the smaller one (*Loki*, *WandaVision*). Benedict Cumberbatch is back as the Sorcerer Surpreme, who's trying to keep all these separate timelines from colliding into one another, as well as keeping various supernatural forces at bay. Chiwetel Ejiofor is on hand as the frenemy you love to hate, and Elizabeth Olsen is confirmed to appear as the Scarlet Witch; we're assuming she won't be the only Avenger dropping by.

John Wick: Chapter 4

May 27

When we last left Mr. John Wick, killing machine extraordinaire, he'd been pushed off a building yet remained both alive and very pissed off. It's safe to say that by the time this new chapter begins, he'll be back on his feet and ready to wage war against the High Table. So yes, it's more of Keanu Reeves kicking ass, stabbing thugs, and shooting whole armies of goons who stand in his way, while looking fabulous in immaculately tailored suits. You know the drill. Laurence Fishburne, Ian McShane, and Lance Reddick are returning as well; martial-arts-movie legend Donnie Yen joins the fun as well. Stuntman turned director Chad Stahelski is once again calling the shots. We can't wait.

Top Gun: Maverick

May 27

Because you never really get rid of that need for speed, right? Tom Cruise returns to one of his most famous roles: Pete "Maverick" Mitchell, former hotshot fighter pilot who's now an instructor in the Navy's Top Gun program. Naturally, he's got some things to teach the whippersnappers who think their egos can write checks that their bodies can, in fact, not cash. Especially since one of them, Bradley Bradshaw (Miles Teller), has a huge chip on his shoulder and a need to prove himself. Oh, did we mention he's the son of Maverick's late partner, Goose? Also hovering near various cockpits and landing strips: Ed Harris, Jon Hamm, Jennifer Connelly, *Set It Up*'s Glen Powell, and *The Good*

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: CLAY ENOS/COLUMBIA PICTURES; NIKO TAVERNISE/LIONSGATE; SONY PICTURES; JEAN MARIE LEROY/ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS; JAY MAIDMENT/© 2016 MARVEL; SCOTT GARFIELD/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Place's Manny Jacinto. Take our breath away one more time, Tom!

Lightyear
June 17

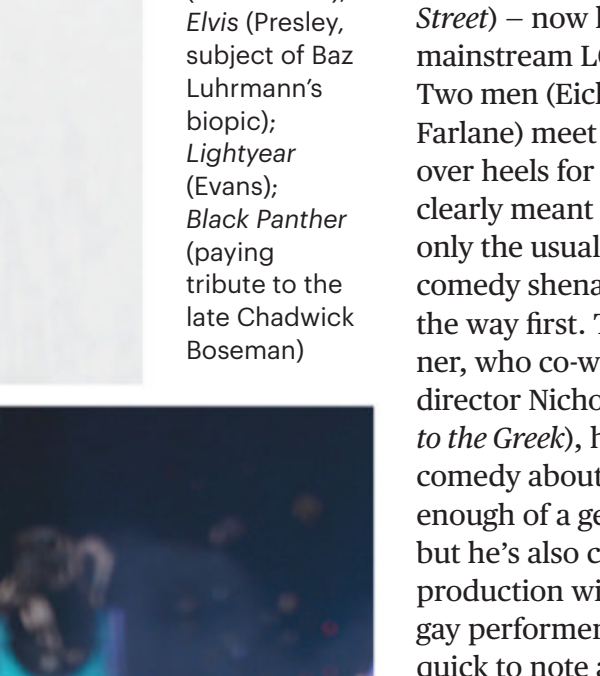
Finally, the real scoop behind everyone's favorite *Toy Story* interstellar action figure. This Pixar spinoff takes us back to Buzz Lightyear's beginning, long before he was the delusional, plastic li'l buddy of Woody and friends – this is supposedly an animated version of the fictional live-action movie that inspired the toy, with no less than Captain America, i.e., Chris Evans, voicing the human Buzz. Taika Waititi lends his dulcet tones to an unnamed character. In the spirit of equal time, we're demanding a similar companion film that dives into Woody's backstory, to be titled *When Snake Met Boot*.

Elvis
June 24

Given the way that Kurt Russell captured the King of Rock & Roll way back in John Carpenter's 1979 movie, there's really no reason to do another biopic on Elvis Presley. Unless, of course, you can get Baz Luhrmann to co-write and direct it, in which case you're likely to get an oddball, over-the-top version of Presley's rise and demise. (Fingers crossed he's going to *Moulin Rouge* this thing to the max!) Plus, Austin Butler has the smoldering sex appeal of a young Elvis, and we're extremely curious to see what Tom Hanks does with Colonel Tom Parker, Presley's infamous control-freak manager.

Thor: Love and Thunder
July 8

Taika Waititi's sequel to his MCU best-in-show entry *Thor: Ragnarok* asks the question: What if someone besides the traditional tall, blond, and handsome Thor took on the powers of the God of Thunder? Like, say, his old romantic interest Jane Foster, who's undergoing treatments to fight an aggressive cancer? Chris Hemsworth is back as the big ol' Asgardian, Natalie Portman returns to play Foster, Tess Thompson gives us more of her tough-talking Valkyrie, and Christian Bale joins the party as Gorr the God Butcher. Oh, and apparently a whole bunch of the Guardians of the Galaxy were in the neighborhood as well, so they're in this too. Cool.



NOT ALL HEROES WEAR CAPES From top: *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* (Moore); *Thor* (Hemsworth); *Elvis* (Presley, subject of Baz Luhrmann's biopic); *Lightyear* (Evans); *Black Panther* (paying tribute to the late Chadwick Boseman)

Nope
July 22

Here's what we know about Jordan Peele's upcoming new project: Like *Get Out* and *Us*, it's a horror movie. It stars Daniel Kaluuya (which has led some folks to wonder if it's a stealth *Get Out* sequel), Keke Palmer, and Steven Yeun. The poster features what appears to be a giant cloud hovering over a small city. And the film was shot in 65mm by the same cinematographer who lensed *Dunkirk*, so it's likely to be something ambitious enough to fill up a big, big screen. That's about it so far, but c'mon: Jordan Peele horror movie? You're there no matter what.

Bros
Aug. 12

Billy Eichner has already gifted us the greatest gonzo-interview TV show ever (see *Billy on the Street*) – now he gives us a gonzo mainstream LGBTQ rom-com. Two men (Eichner and Luke MacFarlane) meet cute and fall head over heels for each other. They're clearly meant to be together, if only the usual host of romantic-comedy shenanigans don't get in the way first. The fact that Eichner, who co-wrote the script with director Nicholas Stoller (*Get Him to the Greek*), has given us a goofy comedy about two men in love is enough of a genre breakthrough, but he's also cast the entire production with out-and-proud gay performers. Even, as he was quick to note after the film was announced, the straight parts.

Salem's Lot
Sept. 9

Stephen King's classic novel about a writer returning to his hometown and discovering that something strange is plaguing the populace (hint: it involves sharp teeth, jugular veins, and sleeping in coffins) was adapted for TV in 1979, starring David Soul and

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: SONY PICTURES ANIMATION; REINHARD ARCHIVES/ULLSTEIN BILD/GETTY IMAGES; © MARVEL STUDIOS 2019; PIXAR; © MARVEL STUDIOS 2018

James Mason; it continues to haunt that first generation of King fanatics, who caught it over two nights. (We're still afraid to look out of our second-story windows after dark and see a Nosferatu-looking dude staring back at us.) Now, his seminal vampire story gets the blockbuster treatment, courtesy of writer-director Gary Dauberman – which, considering he wrote the screenplays for both of the *It* movies, gives us hope that this new *Salem's Lot* will do justice to the source material.

Mission: Impossible 7
Sept. 30

Welcome back, Ethan Hunt! You can't keep a good superspy down, especially if he's played by the seemingly indefatigable Tom Cruise, which means we get a seventh movie in what's become one of the more dependable action franchises around today. Details on the plot are as classified as the Impossible Mission Force's dossiers, but we do know that series regulars Rebecca Ferguson, Ving Rhames, Vanessa Kirby, and Simon Pegg are onboard, and *Agent Carter*'s Hayley Atwell joins the team. We're assuming Tom did all of his own stunts once again, and that he'll try to outdo the previous spectacular *M:I* set pieces by jumping off a building while wrestling a live alligator or something.

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse (Part One)
Oct. 7

Sure, we just had Tom Holland encountering a bunch of folks from various multiverses in last year's *Spider-Man: No Way Home,* but the 2018 animated movie – the one in which we finally got a Miles Morales-as-Spider-Man adventure – explored that territory first. To say we're stoked to see where this sequel takes the animated side-Spidey world greatly undersells our enthusiasm; it's one of the few superhero movies that's captured the giddy thrill of reading comic books while wearing some serious smarts on its web-patterned sleeves at the same time. Shameik Moore and Hailee Steinfeld are in the vocal booths again, and *Soul* writer/co-director Kemp Powers joins the creative team. The fact that they're calling this "Part One" suggests they have something big up their web-covered sleeves.

The Flash
Nov. 4

Funny we should mention multiverses, because guess what? There's some head-on timeline collisions in this solo outing of the speedy D.C. hero as well. Ezra Miller sprints back into the picture as Barry Allen, determined to reverse the course of his mother's death via some fleet-footed tricks. He then somehow opens up a portal to other alternate realities, yadda yadda yadda, with the end result being that he has to deal with two different Batmans. And yes, the rumors are true: Michael Keaton will once again be donning the mask and cowl of Gotham City's favorite vigilante, which will be its own kind of time travel for those who grew up in the 1980s.

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever
Nov. 11

It's tough to imagine a *Black Panther* movie without the late, great Chadwick Boseman, who portrayed Wakanda's king T'Challa and helped turn Ryan Coogler's 2018 blockbuster into the greatest MCU movie to date. Coogler and the returning cast (which includes Letitia Wright, Daniel Kaluuya, Lupita Nyong'o, Winston Duke, Danai Gurira, Martin Freeman, and Angela Bassett) have said they want this sequel to honor Boseman's legacy in addition to building off the first film's story, and the emphasis is supposedly going to center more on Wright's Shuri, the king's techno-savvy sister. Wakanda forever, indeed!

She Said
Nov. 18

Every great journalistic story deserves its own star-studded drama (see *All the President's Men, Spotlight*), and this particular ode to the Fourth Estate focuses on how *The New York Times* helped shatter the silence around sexual assault in the film industry and thus launch the #MeToo movement at large. Carey Mulligan and Zoe Kazan are Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor, raking muck on real-life showbiz monsters and, specifically, ex-head of Miramax Harvey Weinstein; Patricia Clarkson, Andre Braugher, and Samantha Morton co-star. German filmmaker Maria Schrader (*I'm Your Man*) directs.

Avatar 2
Dec. 16

OK, so James Cameron swears we're finally getting the first of what will be at least three more sequels to his game-changing 2009 sci-fi epic, which have been in production since the Obama administration. To be fair, the filmmaker and his crew have spent a lot of time developing the bleeding-edge tech they needed to realize his extended vision (including motion-capture scenes performed underwater, which is an FX first), and the notion of shooting all these subsequent movies back to back was bound to delay things slightly. But assuming nothing major happens, we will be going back to Pandora and hanging with the Na'vi again this year, folks.

I Wanna Dance With Somebody
Dec. 23

There's been a wave of Whitney Houston documentaries over the past few years, digging into the good, the bad, and the ugly of the legendary singer's story. Now we get the official biopic, with *Master of None*'s Naomi Ackie playing the talented, troubled Houston. The rest of the cast sounds promising as well, with *Moonlight*'s Ashton Sanders as Bobby Brown, Nafessa Williams as Whitney's confidante Robyn Crawford, and Stanley Tucci (!) as Clive Davis. If you've seen Kasi Lemmons' incredible debut, *Eve's Bayou,* then you know she's the right person to bring the dramatization of Houston's story to the big screen.

Babylon
Dec. 25

If you've been wondering what Oscar-winning writer-director Damien Chazelle would do for an encore after the one-two punch of *La La Land* and *First Man,* the answer is tackle the birth of Tinseltown. His latest is set in the early days of Hollywood's film-industry glory days, complete with glitz and glamour and scandals-behind-the-scenes drama. It's also got an ensemble to die for: Brad Pitt, Margot Robbie, Tobey Maguire, Jean Smart, Olivia Wilde, *SNL*'s Chloe Fineman, Flea, and Spike Jonze. And if the news that Robbie is playing silent-film "It girl" Clara Bow makes you as giddy as it makes us, then Merry Christmas, Film Nerd. ®

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DOJA CAT

[*Cont. from 35*] formance during his first year in office, she feigns ignorance: "I don't know. I know that he has a face and legs and arms and things like that, and he walks around with them."

To an extent, it's novel, even refreshing, to talk to an artist who refuses to engage with any substantive issues of any kind. But it's also part and parcel of a general shitposter outlook, wherein the danger of participating in public displays of earnestness far outweighs any risks associated with cancellation. "What I've learned is, nobody cares. Nobody cares that you're upset about something, unless you're, like, scary and you have a lot of power. No one gives a fuck that you're upset about this casserole that you made," she says of people being angry on social media. "It's fun to just be a goofy guy."

Doja is similarly averse to opening up about her personal life. "I don't like seeing people talking about their relationships and shit on Twitter. That's fucking embarrassing, and it's a dumb thing to do. You know, don't put your personal business out there," she says on Zoom during a follow-up interview, as her cat Alex scurries in the background. (Her Zoom handle at one point, for what it's worth, is "Nicolas Cage.") "I wouldn't, like, announce that I'm single. I'd announce that I'm horny, but I wouldn't announce that I'm single." (For the record, she says she is, though her manager does mention in passing that Doja has a boyfriend who'd previously hated cats.)

Doja says she approaches songwriting similarly to social media, where her emotions take a back seat. "I worry so much about how things sound that I think often the lyrics fall short," she says. "I try not to think about myself too much. I more just think about the tonalities and my voice." Of injecting her personal life into her music, she says: "I don't like to just parade personal experiences through my music because everybody has something to say about me and they think they fucking know me. That kind of turns your life into this big, big Broadway show."

She does confirm, however, that half of *Planet Her* was written in Hawaii in February 2019, when she was vacationing with Asrat and rebounding from a breakup (though she doesn't specify whether the breakup in question was with her ex-boyfriend, the musician Jawny). The other half was produced in quarantine, reckoning with her explosive success. "We approach songwriting like it's a time capsule of that moment of Doja's life," says Yeti.

Most of *Planet Her* makes Doja's life sound really, really good. "Imagine," Yeti says, is "representative of Doja's journey, the dream come to reality": "Imagine, imagine/Put the studio in the mansion/Pull up in a new high fashion." So is "Payday," a jaunty tune resulting from a collab with Young Thug: When Doja croons in falsetto, "I just can't believe I got what I wanted all my life," you believe her.

Then there is "Alone," one of Doja's favorite songs on *Planet Her*. On its surface, "Alone" is a throwback R&B jam about a slovenly ingrate of an ex-lover. But the second verse alludes more explicitly to the pressures of success: "I ain't wanna share my dreams when it involves you/Not the man I need," she raps. "Started feelin' like I failed my team/Missin' gigs for you, bet you never felt like me." She also alludes to her ex feeling resentful of her success and in turn behaving ungraciously toward her: "Spendin' bands last week while your ass act cheap/Lonely at the top while your ass miles deep/Got me thinkin' that you scared of yourself, not me."

"Alone" shows a glimpse at the flip side to achieving your dreams, the enormous weight of responsibility that comes with having people's livelihoods rise and fall on your ability to successfully post premium-bottled-water sponcon. And it's a song I think a lot about in October, when Doja writes some posts on Twitter that raise alarm bells for many of her fans.

"I'm just tired and i don't want to do anything. im not happy.:\ I'm done saying yes to motherfuckers cuz I cant even have a week to just chill. im never not working. im fucking tired," she said in the posts. "[I] just keep agreeing to shit I dont wanna do in the future. its my own dumb ass fault. And then im too tired to put any effort into this shit. cuz im so run down from everything else." As soon as they appeared on the internet, Doja deleted the tweets.

When I ask Doja about the tweets, she seems almost embarrassed. "I really hesitated on posting that in the first place, because I don't really need people feeling bad for me and shit 'cause I'm really fine," she says. "I just was, like, very fucking tired. There was a lot of shit going on, and I needed to vent a little bit. But obviously Twitter is not the best place to talk about that." She later tweeted "i like pumkins" with a pumpkin emoji.

"Going forward, I don't want to post things like that because I don't want people to feel worried or anything like that," she says. "It feels dramatic. I don't think it's very beneficial." Later that fall, she will go on Instagram Live and echo the sentiments she'd shared with me in the kitchen of the Airbnb: that she missed making music, that she just wanted to be back in the studio. "I'm doing all of this shit that I don't fucking want to do," she said. "I don't wanna take fucking pictures . . . I love fashion . . . I love to dress up . . . I feel pressured to do shit like that. I don't fucking wanna do that."

After Doja cuts our lobster-roll dinner short, one of her managers sits with me outside of the Airbnb to wait for my Uber. "Us, as management, it puts us in a tough position," she says of Doja and other artists' grueling schedules. "Obviously, we want to bring everything to her and to all of our clients, and make their careers what they want them to be. But I don't know if everybody gets into this business realizing – you can make it, but you have to work twice as hard when you get on top, to stay on top. The grind at the beginning is just a different grind."

NEXT YEAR THE grind will continue with Doja Cat's first full-length tour. She's also planning a yet-to-be-finalized cooking show, in the style of Action Bronson's Vice series. She loves experimenting with recipes, making Wagyu sandwiches with Gruyere truffle cheese and fondue for dinner-party guests, attributing her love of cooking to an "insanely French" ex-boyfriend. "Amala loves to cook. You'd think she just wants to be a housewife," says Asrat. "If Amala could stay at home and cook for a month, she would. That's her in her element. But Doja can't."

There are many things that Amala would like to do right now that Doja can't. She'd like to travel, preferably to go back to Italy. She'd like to relax in the pool at her new house in Beverly Hills, which she recently moved into. She'd like to hang out with her cats. She'd like to sit in one of the bean bags she has in her living room and play Xbox. She'd like to go back to the studio and make music, which is the reason she started the grind to begin with. She'd just like to party. She'd just like a lap dance. She just wants to pop up on these clowns like she's the Batman.

THE LOST GOSPEL OF DMX

[*Cont. from 48*] Ron Sweeney, an entertainment lawyer who represented DMX during the early years of his career and who's now representing his three sons, says the estate is "absolutely not" aligned with Mann on his plan to release the gospel album.

"Howard Mann has no authority that we're aware of and hasn't shown us anything to reflect that he owns any music that DMX recorded," Sweeney says. "He has absolutely nothing to do with the estate and, to the extent that he has DMX's music, the estate has not authorized the use of DMX's name and likeness."

Pat Gallo was "extremely surprised" to learn that anyone other than DMX or himself had any ownership claim to the gospel album. After a number of years without seeing each other following their time in Arizona, Gallo reconnected with DMX in 2015, when the rapper moved back to New York. He began to more formally manage DMX a few years later, and he oversaw the 2019 tour celebrating the 20th anniversary of the rapper's debut. In those years, Gallo and DMX regularly listened to and talked about the gospel songs they'd made together.

DMX wanted to perform the gospel album on a tour of megachurches across the South. His ultimate goal, according to Gallo, was to establish his own church called House of the Afflicted, where he would minister to the homeless, those dealing with addiction, and anyone else that society had neglected. But DMX was waiting until he felt ready to release the album. "He thought he would get a lot of scrutiny. He felt insecure about that," Gallo says. "He didn't want to put it out until he got his life together."

YEAR AFTER YEAR, even in the midst of his most difficult periods, fans came to see DMX perform. They came for his anthems and his energy, but they also came to hear him pray.

Unlike the other prayers he wrote and recited on his albums, the prayer that DMX recorded for *You'll Fly With Me Later* comes directly from the Bible. Over guitar strumming and soft percussion, he reads from Ephesians 6:10, a passage in which Paul the Apostle provides instructions on how to prepare for spiritual warfare.

"Put on the whole armor of God, so that you might be able to withstand against the wiles of the Devil," DMX reads, quickly and decisively, in the authoritative tone of someone delivering holy words. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age."

DMX wrestled with all of the above. At points in his life, the battles he fought were also his main product. Anyone who listened to DMX was invested in his pain, in his comebacks, and in his chaotic falls from grace. For decades, he laid his soul bare in his songs, hoping that by revealing his own wounds he could heal and be healed in turn.

"Above all, taking the shield of faith," he reads finally, his voice fading into the music behind it.

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[*Cont. from 67*] house in Fayetteville, he had shot and killed his closest friend, a Green Beret named Mark Leshikar, with whom he had been drinking and doing drugs for days on end during a family vacation to Disney World. For reasons that remain a mystery, Lavigne had pulled out the .40-caliber sidearm he carried and double-tapped his best buddy right in front of two horrified little girls, his daughter and Leshikar's.

The military had kept it quiet, though. In local news reports, the shooter wasn't named. The sheriff's office and the DA had treated it as a justifiable homicide, and Army investigators would later come to the same conclusion, for reasons that both civilian and military authorities decline to disclose to the Leshikar family or to the public. Even if Lavigne had been charged with or convicted of murder, says Col. Kazin of Army JAG, Vallejo would have had a constitutional right to call him as a witness, if he were in possession of relevant information.

Poppe says he can't recall the substance of Lavigne's testimony, but discloses that after the court-martial concluded, he took him on as a client, too. "I was Billy's attorney," Poppe says. "I represented him in Cumberland County."

Poppe does not find it remarkable, he says, that he simultaneously represented two members of the most elite military unit in the United States, one suspected of murder, the other accused of rape. But he was in JAG for 20 years and has represented such high-profile military clients as Maj. Nidal Hasan, the Fort Hood shooter, and is unable to recall another time when a JSOC operator was arrested for a violent felony against a fellow soldier on U.S. soil, as was the case for both Lavigne and Vallejo.

Poppe says there was no connection between the two cases. Lavigne retained him while still under Army investigation into the shooting death of Leshikar, he says. Ultimately, "both CID and the sheriff's office determined there was no criminal culpability."

Between the summer of 2018 and the fall of 2020, Lavigne's behavior became increasingly erratic and dangerous. Cumberland County sheriff's deputies named him as a suspect on incident reports for crimes including possession of cocaine and crack paraphernalia, weapons infractions, hit-and-run, harboring an escapee, maintaining a dwelling place to manufacture a controlled substance, and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. The latter was for firing shots at a guy outside a crack house on Enloe Street in Fayetteville, a very serious offense, but Lavigne was not prosecuted for any of these crimes. North Carolina court records show that the sheriff and DA's office dismissed the charges every time.

Then, on Dec. 2, 2020, Lavigne turned up dead, shot multiple times in the chest, his body wrapped up as if for disposal, and placed in the back of his truck, which was left abandoned on a dirt road near Lake MacArthur. An anonymous Army source leaked to CBS News that authorities suspected "a double homicide from a drug deal gone wrong," but to date, there is no clear evidence to support that theory.

The other person killed in the apparently professional hit, a 44-year-old ex-soldier named Timothy Dumas, was an Afghanistan vet who had served in the 7th Special Forces Group before being separated from the Army for unspecified "unacceptable conduct." Like Lavigne, Dumas had a long record of being arrested but not prosecuted in Cumberland County, for crimes including assault on a female, impersonating a police officer, making terroristic threats, and shooting into an occupied dwelling place. His truck, a black quad-cab Dodge Ram, was found some 40 miles away, in Scotland County, "burned to a fucking crisp," according to his 24-year-old son. "They even took his license plates off."

"Billy, we love you and will miss you," the Coast x Coast club posted to its Instagram page two days later. "RIP, bro."

One year later, the authorities have identified no suspects, arrested no perpetrators, and disclosed nothing about the evidence they've gathered to date. It's not even clear what agency, military or civilian, is investigating. "I'll have to refer you to Army CID," Shelley Lynch of the FBI's Charlotte, North Carolina, office writes in an email. "We are only assisting." But Chris Grey, spokesman for CID, tells me, "FBI is leading that investigation."

ON THE THIRD and final day of Vallejo's court-martial, June 27, the prosecution and defense delivered their closing arguments. Scanlon's SVC – her fifth – discouraged her from attending, she says. "What the prosecution has to say, you already know," she remembers the SVC telling her. "What the defense has to say, you don't want to hear. It's not going to be good for you."

For the jury, it must have been a somewhat close call, because they submitted at least 18 questions to the witnesses. "How did the Uber driver react to the distress shown by 1LT Scanlon?" a juror asked Tina. "If you felt that 1LT Scanlon was sexually assaulted, why was she not taken to the hospital as soon as possible?" another asked the staff sergeant. A third juror asked the nurse who did the rape kit, "In your experience, is it abnormal for the victim to smile in an exam photo?"

Scanlon was called in for the reading of the verdict. She had brought with her a victim's impact statement that she was prepared to read if Vallejo were found guilty. "That night he shattered my whole world," the statement read. "I had to get shots and blood drawn to get tested for STDs so many horrible times." Constant appointments with lawyers, detectives, investigators, and advocates had disrupted her military career, and caused her to miss out on her unit's 2017 deployment to Iraq. "Which is all I wanted to do: deploy with my soldiers." Out of fear that Vallejo "[would try to] come looking for me," she wrote, she moved from Fayetteville to another small town nearby. "I was too scared to go to stores, the gym, and other crowded places. Because every man with a dark beard or a hat terrified me."

But, the statement continued, "I am strong. I will keep fighting to put my life back together. This is not how I wanted my time . . . in the Army to go. But I have accepted this new path. I firmly believe that I had to be his victim because I was strong enough to report him."

She never got the chance to lay any of this on Vallejo, or the court. As the jury filed in, everyone stood. "I held really, really tightly to my [family members'] hands and stared straight ahead," she says. "I was resolved to be stoic no matter what, because I knew I had stood up for myself as much as possible. As soon as they said 'not guilty,' my people just kind of quickly escorted me out."

From the perspective of the Army's image-conscious leadership, the failure on the part of the press to catch wind of Vallejo's court-martial was a lucky break. Someone might easily have connected the rape case to the unexplained shooting of a Green Beret by a fellow Special Forces soldier three months earlier. They might have noticed that the shooter was a witness for the alleged rapist, and that they both belonged to the same motorcycle club, made up of soldiers from the Army's most elite unit. A sort of Delta Force biker gang – that story wouldn't have been good for the Army, not at a time when the Navy was getting hammered by allegations of rampant drug abuse, fratricidal violence, and sexual assault in the ranks of its SEAL teams. The following year, the legal travails of ex-SEAL Eddie Gallagher would make national headlines for months on end. In 2020, *The New York Times,* Associated Press, and CNN would cover the sexual-assault allegation against a Navy SEAL on a base in Iraq. The alleged perpetrator, Adel Anayat, eventually copped to a misdemeanor. Like Gallagher, Anayat was an ordinary Tier 2 special operator, of whom there are as many as 10,000. Lavigne and Vallejo were on an altogether different level, one rarely touched by scandal. Other than the one local-news blip on Vallejo's arrest, the allegations against them remained confined to Fort Bragg.

By the time of Vallejo's trial, it was clear that the Army had missed a chance to intervene in the boundary-pushing, motorcycle-borne debauchery of the Coast x Coast club as early as September 2016, when Scanlon went to CID and alleged that Vallejo had raped her behind their un-permitted clubhouse in downtown Fayetteville, which just happens to be adjacent to the county jail, a building full of cops.

The Army missed another chance to rein in rogue elements in Delta Force's enlisted ranks in 2018, after Lavigne killed Leshikar in a drug-fueled altercation that was proof positive of something rotten in the state of Special Forces. Instead, everything was hushed up. Both Vallejo and Lavigne were exonerated. And every time Lavigne reoffended, the charges against him mysteriously vanished. His spiral into drugs and paranoia culminated in him shooting at a man on the streets of Fayetteville in July 2020. He busted a few rounds in the direction of Ian Detar, an inveterate burglar who has no fewer than 29 mug shots on file with the county.

In September 2021, I visit the crack house where the incident occurred, a run-down home on Enloe Street accessible by a dirt road that a spokeswoman for the sheriff describes as a "known drug house." Seven or eight people are sitting on the stoop or standing around the driveway. None are able to say why the shooting took place, but they all remember Lavigne. It seems he crashed there from time to time.

"We all knew him," says Roy Lynn Parker, 35.

Parker says that Lavigne once gave him money to cover some court costs. He says Lavigne smoked crack, that was his main thing. He denies that Lavigne was ever into dealing any sort of narcotics. He's vague about the shooting incident. "I remember hearing some shots. I think Ian, he said Will shot at him. They picked him up down at the stop sign."

"A big, crazy white man" is how a 52-year-old woman named Renee Locklear describes Lavigne. "He loved weapons." Locklear shows me the spot where she says he once threw a knife into the trunk of a tree in the front yard, which is littered with hundreds if not thousands of cigarette butts. "He always had something in his hand," Locklear says. "If he didn't have a knife, he would be toting around, like Rambo, some bow-and-arrow-type shit."

I only recently learned about Lavigne's July 2020 arrest from a police report that the sheriff's office ini-

tially withheld. The offense was aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, a class E felony that could have landed Lavigne in prison for years, but as usual, he wasn't charged with a crime.

When Jane read that Lavigne had killed a man with impunity, only to be murdered in turn, "I was trembling," she says, "sitting out in the cold, chain-smoking. It's like watching a scary movie. I'm still spooked." She read USASOC's statement in "The Fort Bragg Murders" that some unspecified adverse administrative action had been pending against Lavigne at the time of his death. "How coincidental is it?" she says. "Billy's about to be questioned, or face some sort of retribution. And then he's taken out. It's like someone didn't want him to talk." She adds, "I'm scared to say words like this out loud."

For good reason: The person or persons who killed Lavigne and Dumas remain at large. Whoever they are, they were capable of taking out one of the world's most skilled and experienced gunfighters, without leaving any apparent clue for the FBI or CID to follow. And no one seems to know quite why.

WHILE AWAITING TRIAL, Vallejo had stood down as an active-duty operator, attached to USASOC as an ignominious "SURPLUS SLDR," according to his enlistment-record brief. It's unclear if he ever returned to Delta Force or what he did for his last three years in the military. In September 2021, almost 20 years to the day that he joined the Army, he held a retirement party in Colorado, where he now lives, not far from where he began his military career, at Fort Carson.

Around the same time, he went on a cross-country ride with the Coast x Coast motorcycle club, starting out of Los Angeles and bound for Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. It was their annual "Ride for the Fallen," a coast-to-coast convoy of ex-military bikers to raise money for wounded special operators, and the families of those slain in battle. Each year, they hold a string of events in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, North Carolina, and Virginia, where they sell merchandise, take donations, and raffle off items such as bottles of wine printed with portraits of fallen Delta Force soldiers, concealed-carry holsters, and pistols painted in the colors of the American flag. The Coast x Coast Foundation raised $450,943 in tax-free contributions from 2016 to 2020, according to IRS records. Over those five years, it paid out grants totaling $187,143.

On Sept. 8, 2021, the Coast x Coast club holds a public event in Fayetteville, at their usual haunt, Mac's Speed Shop. On the back patio, they are standing around a red tent with the Coast x Coast logo, drinking beer, chatting at the bar, and smoking cigarettes. According to a 2014 ATF report leaked to The Intercept, outlaw motorcycle gangs are proliferating in the military in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but aside from their vests and patches, the present-day Coast x Coast club looks more like customers in a Bass Pro Shop than Hells Angels.

The person who seems to be in charge is a tall, barrel-chested man of about 40, whose long, scraggly beard is streaked with gray. He is courteous, with an iron handshake, and gives his name as Joe.

"I knew him," Joe says of Lavigne. "He was a great dude. He came with us, rode the ride. Other than that," he says, "I don't think you're going to get any comment from anybody around here."

I ask whether "Cris Valley" is in attendance. "No," Joe says. "He's at home, doing work shit." That's all he'll say about Coast x Coast's founder and CEO.

There might be a good reason for Vallejo to avoid the spot where, almost five years ago to the day, he met Scanlon. Since he was tried by the military, a branch of the federal government, the double-jeopardy clause of the U.S. Constitution would not bar the state from prosecuting him all over again. And in North Carolina, there is no statute of limitations for rape.

For her part, Scanlon tried hard not to show any emotion in public, and accepted the jury's July 2018 decision with stoicism. But it was a "disheartening" conclusion, she says, to a difficult and drawn-out ordeal that she insists was "not my fault."

She understood that "beyond a reasonable doubt" was a high burden of proof, and evinced no particular desire to see Vallejo in prison. "It is a lot for a jury to make a decision like that," she says. "It didn't necessarily mean they didn't believe me." Unfortunately, her experience with the military-justice system greatly set back her career, and would overshadow her whole time in the Army.

She attained the rank of captain, but the missed deployment, the transfers between units, and the stigma that attaches to female soldiers who report being raped – all the "gossipy, nontangible ways," she says, that marks you out as a "problem child" – diminished her prospects of advancement. When her contract was up in 2019, she resigned from the Army.

Once out of uniform, Scanlon began to meet advocates, lawyers, and people knowledgeable about sexual assault in the military. In 2020, she sued the Army in civil court for allegedly mishandling her case, but the lawsuit was blocked by the so-called Feres doctrine, established in 1950 by a Supreme Court decision that a broad range of legal scholars variously describe as archaic, unfair, irrational, unconscionable, and immoral. The doctrine, long a target of legislative reform, bars soldiers and sailors and Marines from recovering damages resulting from wrongful acts by the military.

More than she questions Vallejo's acquittal or the jury's decision, Scanlon simply wants to know what happened at the court-martial. She filed a FOIA request for the transcript in 2019, and the Army gave her the trial record instead. It's hundreds of pages long, but does not include the testimony of witnesses or the arguments the lawyers made.

A spokesman for USASOC tells me that no transcript of the audio recordings of the trial proceedings was ever typed up because Vallejo was acquitted, so there was no possibility of an appeal. The Army couldn't give Scanlon a transcript because no transcript ever existed. In addition, according to USASOC, the court reporter deleted the audio.

"It was standard practice at the time," Col. Kazin says. "It is something that has changed now, for exactly this reason. Starting in 2019, victims who testify get a copy of the court-martial record, including audio, whether it was an acquittal or conviction."

When Scanlon learns that the audio was destroyed, she unexpectedly breaks down in tears. It's the first time during many hours of interviews that she has lost her composure, and I can understand why. The Army's destruction of records means that she will never know what was said in her absence at trial. Those deleted files were the only record of the testimony the jurors chose to believe over hers.

Looking back on the court-martial, "it was a solid case and my testimony was powerful," Scanlon says, "but I was this lowly lieutenant up against Delta Force and USASOC and JSOC, and all that entails. Only afterwards did I realize I didn't stand a chance."

↬ '70S PLASTIC SURGERY

[Cont. from 41] By the mid-Eighties, O'Day was running out of schemes. His marriage to Rhyne fell apart. In 1985, he resurfaced in his home state of Maryland, managing a bar, Danny's, on Route 50 in Easton. He only lasted there about a year, and soon after opened another spot, O'Day's Pub.

But a drinking problem that had developed on the road soon overtook him. The pub – and everything in it, including Hamilton Beach mixers, towels, and soap dispensers – was sold in 1988. "He was always looking for his new project," says Patten. "It was in his blood, and I want to think it was the drinking that prohibited him from doing more with his life." O'Day went underground and died in 2003 at age 54 – according to Effie, of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. (Rhyne, by then remarried and known as Deborah Erin Bertalan, died of complications from a brain tumor in 2011.)

For Caywood, Gamble, and Wise, the scars have healed or are now barely detectable; Gamble's mustache covers up his lip cut. Their memories of Rock and Roll Heaven are decidedly mixed. Caywood remembers O'Day as "a big ol' shyster," but the tour launched her into roles in productions of *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar,* as well as an extended run at a Palm Springs club (singing both new and classic pop hits) until her recent retirement. "I bless you, Daniel O'Day," she says, "for opening up such a large part of my life that came out of that."

Wise still feels he and O'Day could have gone all the way with the act: "He had Disney World, all these people calling us – he had it in the palm of his hand and let it go," he says. But thanks to that original operation, Wise still makes a respectable living re-creating Elvis in the Deja Vu Dance and Show Band, a multi-artist tribute act in Vegas. Gamble switched to Christian music and eventually became an ordained minister in Arizona, where he currently lives.

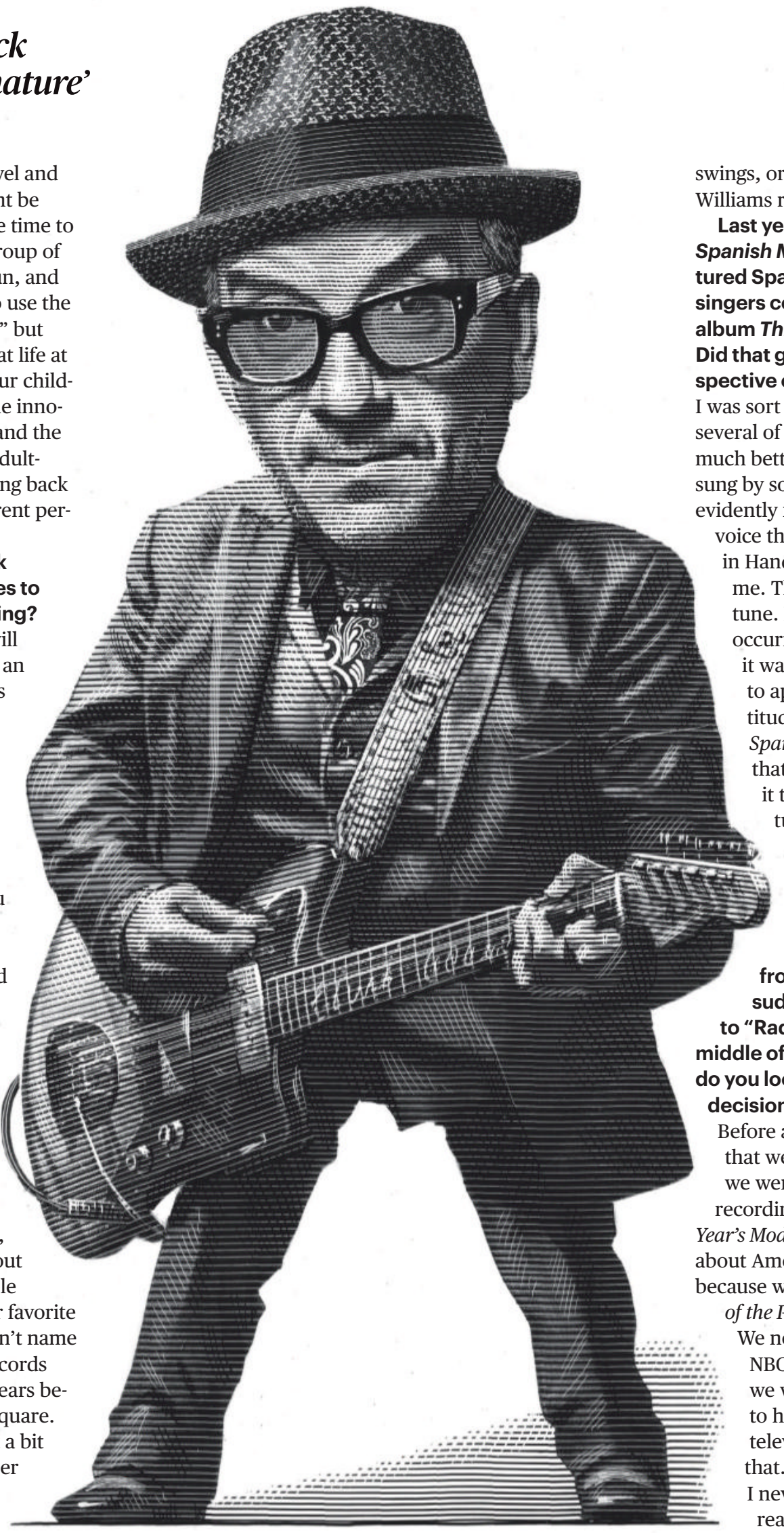
Whether he knew it or not, O'Day saw the future – our future. He envisioned a world in which celebrity worship would rule, everyday people could be elevated to stardom, and there would be no shame in any of it. "In 40 years, it's become more acceptable to do something like that, compared to back then," says Eyellusion's Pezzuti. "From a standpoint of being original and doing something that wasn't being done, I give him credit for putting his neck on the line. . . . He could have made a killing in Atlantic City."

Some involved in Rock and Roll Heaven wanted to forget it ever existed. On their way out of Nevada after the tour ended, a few of the singers and band members made a pit stop in the desert. Dragging along the white suits they'd been forced to wear onstage, the musicians piled them atop one another and set the clothes afire, resulting in what Caywood recalls as an unholy muck of "cow patties, dirt, and melted polyester."

A few years later, Caywood and her then-husband, who was in the band, returned to the site, and there the pile remained, in all its mangled glory. Caywood wound up taking the gross heap home with her, with the thought of encasing it in glass and turning it into a coffee table. The plan was scuttled when someone accidentally tossed out the whole mess. The mementos may be gone. But in the current landscape, where dead pop stars seem as prevalent as living, breathing ones, Danny O'Day's outlandish vision remains open for business.

Elvis Costello

The master songwriter on his back catalog and why he's a 'freak of nature'



In 1977, you said that your primary motivations were "revenge and guilt." Does that still hold true?
Yeah, I had drunk about half a bottle of Pernod when I said that. I thought it sounded good and so did the journalist, and then I have people quoting it back to me as if it was a page from the catechism. It's just some moment of bravado. It sounds dramatic, doesn't it? But think it through for a minute and it doesn't make sense. But awfully picturesque.

Costello's new album, 'The Boy Named If,' is out Jan. 14.

How did you learn to move past that press persona?
Making 30 or more albums. Each one is different in personality. Those records sometimes require you to unpack that mythmaking aspect of those first few records, because if you listen to the individual songs on those first albums, you'll find much more nuance to what's being said about anything. And to some degree, if you're stuck with my face and my voice, things sound more aggressive because I'm a freak of nature. I have a gap in my teeth. Everything explodes out of my mouth as either a threat or a snarl [*laughs*].

You've said that your new album, *The Boy Named If,* deals with the process of maturing from childhood to adulthood. What got you thinking along those lines?
Not being able to travel and knowing when I might be back onstage gave me time to think. I looked at a group of songs that I had begun, and they were . . . I hate to use the word "philosophical," but they did have a look at life at different times: in your childhood, as you leave the innocence of childhood, and the confusion of young adulthood, and then looking back at things with a different perspective later.

What do you think caused those themes to surface in your writing?
I do have boys that will be 15 next week, and an elder son who's in his forties, so I have the perspective on some of these transitions. And I lost my father 10 years ago; I lost my mother early last year. Those things will tend to make you think about yourself as a child because now you're promoted by that event in some way.

What still attracts you to writing rock music?
I don't like much rock music. I like rock & roll. I think if you lose the roll part, a lot of the fun goes out of it. And when people ask me, "What's your favorite record?" I usually don't name any electric-guitar records made in the last 30 years because the beat is so square. I like things that float a bit or swing a bit, whether it's rock & roll or actual jazz that swings, or even the way Hank Williams records lope.

Last year, you released *Spanish Model,* which featured Spanish-speaking singers covering your album *This Year's Model*. Did that give you a new perspective on those songs?
I was sort of shocked to find several of these songs had much better tunes when sung by somebody with an evidently more beautiful voice than I have. "Hand in Hand" quite surprised me. That's quite a pretty tune. It literally never occurred to me, because it was "don't ask me to apologize" – all attitude. And then [on *Spanish Model*] I heard that I'd actually set it to quite a tender tune, much more so than I sang it.

Speaking of attitude, in 1977, you were famously banned from *SNL* after suddenly switching to "Radio, Radio" in the middle of your slot. How do you look back on that decision now?
Before anybody noticed that we'd even done it, we were back in England, recording the rest of *This Year's Model*. We'd forgotten about America temporarily, because we had to be on *Top of the Pops* in England. We never thought about NBC again. . . . It's clear we weren't going to have a career in television; they told us that. And guess what? I never wanted one really. KORY GROW

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